



RELEASE THAT WITCH

BOOK 01

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EPUB CREATION BY LISA HAYES

Release That Witch

(放开那个女巫)

by

Er Mu

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Synopsis

Cheng Yan transmigrated only to end up in a medieval Europe like world, becoming Roland, a Royal Prince. But this world doesn't seem to be the same as his former world, despite some similarities. Witches are real and they actually can use magic?

Follow Roland's battle for the throne against his siblings. Will he be able to win, even though the king already declared him to be a hopeless case and with the worst starting situation? With his knowledge of modern technologies and the help of the witches, who are known as devils' servants and are hunted by the the Holy Church, he might have a fighting chance.

Now, let his journey begin.

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1st Saga - Stepping Into A New World

Chapter 1 - From Today Onwards, I'm A Royal Prince

Cheng Yan could sense that someone was calling him.

“Your Highness, please wake up...”

He turned his head away, but the sounds he'd heard didn't disappear, they actually proceeded to get even louder instead. Then, he felt someone gently tug on his sleeve.

“Your Highness, my Royal Prince!”

Cheng Yan's eyes snapped open. His familiar surroundings had disappeared, his work desk was gone, and the familiar walls filled with post-its were gone. They'd all been replaced by a strange landscape. A round public square that was enclosed by small brick houses, and the gallows that were erected in the center of the square now dominated his field of view. He himself sat at a table across the square from the gallows. There wasn't a soft rotating office chair under his butt, but a cold hard iron chair instead. There was also a group of people sitting with him and watching him intently. Several of them were dressed as medieval lords and ladies from those Western flicks, and were trying to suppress their giggles.

What the hell? Wasn't I just rushing to finish my mechanical blueprints before the deadline? Cheng Yan was at a loss as he thought to himself. For three consecutive days, he had been working overtime. Thus, he was both mentally and physically at

his limit. He could only vaguely remember that his heartbeat had become unsteady, and that he'd just wanted to lie down on his desk and take a break...

“Your Highness, please declare your ruling.”

The speaker was the one that had secretly tugged on his sleeve. His face was old, seemingly in his fifties or sixties, and he wore a white robe. At first glance, he looked a bit like Gandalf, from The Lord of the Rings.

Am I dreaming? Cheng Yan thought as he licked his dry lips, Ruling? What ruling?

As he quickly glanced around, his confusion was swept away. The people surrounding him were all looking in the direction of the center of the square, at the gallows. Many townspeople were also in the plaza and were waving their fists while they shouted and even threw an occasional stone towards the gallows and the figure on it.

Cheng Yan had only ever seen such an ancient instrument of death in movies. The gallows consisted of two pillars extending upwards about 4 meters from a raised base, with a crossbeam extending between the two pillars with a thick yellow hemp rope around the middle of the crossbeam. One end of the rope was tied to the gallows, and the other end was tied into a noose around a prisoner's neck.

In this strange dream Cheng Yan thought he was in, he found

that he was able to see everything clearly. Usually, he'd even need to wear his glasses to see the words on a computer screen, but now Chen Yang could see every detail of the gallows, which were fifty meters away, without his glasses.

The prisoner atop the gallows had their head completely covered with a hood and had their hands tied behind their back. They wore dirty grey clothes that were little more than rags draped over a frame so thin, it seemed you could easily wrap your hand around their exposed ankle. Cheng Yan judged the prisoner to be female by her faintly bulging chest, and looked on as she stood there shivering in the chilly wind, but still trying to stand up straight to face her fate on her feet.

Alright then, Cheng Yan thought to himself, what crime did this woman commit that caused so many people to be so outraged, and to wait for her to be hanged with such rage and hostility?

Cheng Yan's memories appeared, almost as if they'd suddenly been turned on and he realized the cause of the situation, and the answer to his question, at almost the same time.

She was a "witch".

She was considered to have fallen to the temptation of the devil and was known as an incarnation of evil.

"Your Highness?" The Gandalf lookalike cautiously urged.

Cheng Yan glanced at the old man. Well, Cheng Yan's new memories told him, the old man wasn't called Gandalf, his real name was Barov, and he was an Assistant Minister of Finance dispatched by the Roland's father to assist in the governing of the territory.

Cheng Yan's identity was that of the 4th Prince of the Kingdom of Graycastle, Roland, and he had been sent here to govern this region. The residents of this border town had caught and seized the witch, immediately turning her over to the local guards to question. Questioning? No, She was immediately sent to be sentenced with no opportunity to defend herself. The execution of suspected witches was usually overseen by the local lords or bishops, but since he'd assumed control of this territory, issuing such orders had become his obligation.

Cheng Yan's memory answered his questions one by one, it was unnecessary to filter and read through them, it was as if they had always been his own experiences. He was momentarily confused, there was absolutely no way a dream could have so many details. Then, Cheng Yan thought, was it possible that this wasn't a dream? I've really traveled through time, to the dark ages of medieval Europe, and have become Roland? I've gone from a pitiful mechanical engineer with his nose down in his papers to a grand 4th Prince overnight?

This piece of territory that looked so barren and backward was in the Kingdom of Graycastle, a name that he had never seen in his history books.

Well, then how do I want to handle this? Cheng Yan thought to

himself.

Cheng Yan decided he would try and examine how an unscientific thing like being transported through time and space had happened later, his immediate concern was with how to stop the farce taking place in front of him. Assigning the blame for the disasters and misfortune that befell them onto these “witches” was the act of ignorant barbarians. He really couldn’t bring himself to do anything as stupid as hanging another person just to satisfy the watching masses.

He grabbed the formal written orders held by Barov and tossed them to the ground and slowly said, “I’m feeling tired, we will give our judgement another day. Court dismissed, now disperse people!”

Cheng Yan knew he couldn’t risk being reckless, so he rummaged carefully through his memories and reflected the former prince’s behavior. He had to continue on with the former prince’s dandyism and roguish behavior. That’s right, the fourth prince himself was messed up, had a nasty character, and did whatever he wanted with no thoughts to the consequences of his actions. Anyways, Cheng Yan mused, could they really expect an uncontrollable twenty-something year old to have good behavior?

The members of the nobility who sat with him maintained their equanimity at his unexpected statement, but a tall man wearing a suit of armor stood up and argued, “Your Highness, this isn’t a joke! All known witches should be put to death immediately upon being identified, or other witches might be tempted to try and save her! Do you want to force the church to get involved when they

hear that we have allowed a witch to live? We have no choice in this matter!”

Carter, this dashing man, was actually his Knight Commander. Cheng Yan frowned and said, “Why? Are you scared?” His voice was full of blatant mockery and wasn’t a complete act. A man with an arm thicker than the waist of the so called “witch” actually feared a prison raid from women. Were witches really the devil’s messengers? “Wouldn’t it be better to catch more witches than to settle for only one?”

Seeing him no longer utter a word, Cheng Yan waved his hand to call his personal guards and left. Carter hesitated a moment before going down and catching up with the troops walking by the 4th prince’s side. The other nobles got up and paid their respects to the prince, but Cheng Yan could see undisguised contempt from the eyes of those in the crowd.

Back in the keep, the castle was located to the south of the border town, he dismissed the anxious Minister Barov outside the door to his chambers, allowing him to finally breathe a sigh of relief now that he was alone.

As a person who’d spent ninety percent of his time dealing with people through a computer, facing everyone like he just had already surpassed his comfort zone. Cheng Yan found the location of his bedroom from his new memories, took a seat on his bed, and got a moment of real rest as he tried to suppress his violently beating heart. At the moment, the most important matter was to clarify the situation. Why was the prince, who couldn’t stay in Wimbledon City, the capital of the kingdom, sent to this barren

land?

The unexpected answer he came up with left him stupefied.

Roland Wimbledon was actually sent here to fight for the right to succeed the king.

Everything had originated from King Wimbledon III of Graycastle's wonderful proclamation to his children saying, "You want to inherit the kingdom? The first-born prince doesn't necessarily have the right to become king, only the person who proves themselves as the most capable of governing can inherit the country." He placed various territories under the rule of his five children, and after five years he'd decide who would become his successor based on the level of skill they displayed in governing their respective territories.

While turning the decision of who should inherit the throne into a meritocracy and providing equal opportunity regardless of gender might sound like very enlightened concepts, the real problem was with the actual implementation of said ideas. Would there be any guarantee that all five of them received the same starting conditions? This wasn't like playing a real-time strategy game. To his knowledge, the second son had been given a better territory than this border town. Actually when he thought about it, it seemed that among the five regions they'd been given, none of the others were worse than his frontier town. His starting point was simply inferior.

Also, Cheng Yan wondered, how was one to assess the level of governance? By the population? Military power? Economic

standing? Wimbledon III hadn't mentioned any standard, nor did he put the slightest restrictions on their methods of competition. In case someone secretly assassinated the other candidates, what would he do? Would the queen stand by and watch her children kill each other? Wait. He carefully recalled the next memory, all right, another piece of bad news; the Queen had died five years ago.

Cheng Yan sighed. Obviously, this was a barbaric and dark feudal era he had found himself in. Just the way they seemed to wantonly kill witches was enough to give him a few hints. Also, Cheng Yan thought, why would he want to become king? With no internet and none of the comforts of modern civilization, he'd have to live the same life as the native people. Burning witches for fun, living in a city where everyone dumped their excrement wherever they wished, and finally dying from the Black Death.

Cheng Yan being a prince could already be considered a very high starting point. Even if he didn't become king he was still of royal blood and had already been knighted. As long as he managed to stay alive he would be considered as one of the Lords of the Realm.

Cheng Yan suppressed his wandering thoughts and went to his bedroom mirror. The man looking back at him in the mirror had light gray hair, which was the royal family's most distinctive feature. His face was slightly pale and with his regular facial features, he seemed to be completely without personality traits. He appeared to be lacking in physical exercise and as for wine and woman, he recalled indulging in both with some regularity. He had had several lovers in the King's City, but all had been willing participants, he hadn't forced anyone.

As for the cause of his own crossing over... Cheng Yan guessed that thanks to the company's inhuman urging to progress forward, his boss had arranged for him to work overtime, which in turn actually led to the tragedy that was his sudden death. The victims of cases like these were usually coders, mechanical engineers, and programmers.

In the end, no matter what, at least I got the equivalent of an extra life. I really shouldn't complain too much, in the coming days, I might be able to slowly improve this life, but my first task is to play a convincing 4th Prince, so that other people don't find something amiss with my behavior and think I'm possessed by the devil, leading to my being burned at the stake, Cheng Yan thought to himself.

"So, in order to live well..." Cheng Yan took a deep breath, looked in the mirror, and whispered, "from now on, I'm Roland."

Chapter 2 - The Witch Named Anna (Part I)

For a period of time Roland locked himself in his room as he carefully reviewed the memories of this new world, such that dinner had to be sent directly to him by his servants.

Roland suppressed his fear of the unfamiliar environment he found himself in under his strong will to live. He was very clear that if he wanted to blend in and avoid being suspected by the people around him he needed to get more information as soon as possible.

Roland had to say that the fourth prince had, apart from fooling around with some other sons of the nobility, no additional things in his brain. Over and over again, Roland was unable to remember any valuable information such as knowledge of the aristocracy, the political situation in his own country, or the diplomatic situation with his neighbors. As for basic common sense, such as city names, or the years of significant events, they were completely different than the history of Europe he knew.

It seemed that based on his memories, the old Roland had had absolutely no chance of obtaining the throne. Perhaps the King of Graycastle was aware of this, and because of that, the prince had been thrown into this hellish place, even if he made a mess of things in this border town, it wouldn't result in much damage to the kingdom.

The next memories Roland looked at were of his brothers and sisters, and what he found left him unsure whether he should laugh or cry.

Roland's eldest brother, the First Prince, had an above average military power, his second brother was scheming and horridly treacherous, his third sister was afraid of death, and his younger sister was brilliant. This was the entirety of the former fourth prince's impressions of his siblings. Roland felt a little awkward, after more than a decade of living with them the old Roland's knowledge had been summed up in a few words. What forces they'd developed, who their competent subordinates were, what they were experts at, what their plans were and so on...he knew nothing at all.

It was only three months ago that the fourth prince had come to this frontier town, but the nobility had already stopped hiding their contempt for him. It was obvious that the fourth prince wasn't cut out to be a leader. Fortunately, when the King had left Roland this territory, he had sent along two of his more capable subordinates to provide assistance so the townspeople wouldn't suffer under the old Roland's inept rule.

After Roland woke up the next morning one of his maids, Tyre, repeatedly mentioned that the Assistant Minister wanted to see him. When it seemed that he could put it off no longer Roland acted according to his past memories and reached out to cup the maid's ass before sending her to fetch Barov, who had been waiting in the drawing room.

Seeing the flushing Tyre exit the room, Roland suddenly realized that, since he had reincarnated, shouldn't he have a system or something like that? At least in many tales that was the standard formula, but the arrival of a system never happened.

Sure enough, what Roland had read in those novels was all fiction.

In the drawing room, Barov was already restless from waiting. The moment Roland appeared he asked, “Your Highness, why didn’t you order the execution yesterday?”

“One day earlier, one day later, what’s the difference?” Roland said as he clapped his hands, letting the attendants know to bring his breakfast in, “Sit down, Barov.”

The impressions he had from the old Roland’s memories, and also based on his own opinion, was that the Knight Commander liked to confront problems with the fourth prince directly face to face, even in the presence of others, while the Assistant Minister was more circumspect and liked to discuss issues in private. In any case, the loyalty of the two was likely to be to the King.

“A day later may lead to other witches appearing, my royal prince! This isn’t the same as before with your previous escapades, not during this time of chaos!” Barov cautioned.

“How can you even say that?” Roland asked while frowning, “I thought you were capable of distinguishing the differences between superstition and fact.”

Barov looked bewildered, “What superstitions?”

“That a witch is evil and the devil’s messenger,” Roland seemed to not mind as he patiently answered the question. “Isn’t that what the church teaches us? They won’t intervene here, I think it’s actually the opposite. Their propaganda states that witches are evil, and while we’ve chosen not to actively aid their witch hunt, all the people in this territory believe in these shameless superstitions spread by the Church.”

Barov was shocked, “Could...could a witch really be...”

“Indeed evil?” Roland asked, “Like what?”

The Assistant Minister was silent for a moment, trying to decide if the prince was deliberately making fun of him, “Your Highness, this problem can be discussed later. I know you don’t like the church, but this pursuit of conflict is counterproductive.”

Roland curled his lips. It seemed that reversing this superstition about witches wasn’t something that he could do overnight, but for now he decided to put it out of his mind..

When Roland’s breakfast of toast, fried eggs and a carafe of milk arrived he made up two plates, one of which he served to the assistant minister.

“You haven’t eaten until now, right?” asked Roland before he started eating. The maid had told him that Barov had arrived outside his chambers at dawn, and had directly requested to see him, so he shouldn’t have had time to eat. While he’d decided to

imitate the former prince's way of life, he'd also decided to begin to change the way people perceived him a bit at a time.

The Assistant Minister was a good first target for his plan. Roland thought to himself, If you can make your men feel valued, then they'll be more motivated to work for you.

Taking the initiative had always been the most efficient way to win, hadn't it?

Barov took the cup of milk Roland handed him but didn't drink as he anxiously said, "Your Highness, we still have a problem. The guards reported that three days ago, a suspected witch camp was found in the western forest. Because they left in a hurry and didn't clean up all of their traces, a guard found this in the camp."

He took out a coin from his pocket and put it in front of Roland. This wasn't the common currency of the kingdom, at least according to the memories of the old Roland, he hadn't seen such a coin. It wasn't even like theirs, it wasn't even made of metal.

Feeling it in his his hands, he was surprised to find that the coin was warm, and the assistant minister definitely wasn't the source of this sweltering heat of at least forty degrees celsius, which reminded him of the moment when one took a bath.

"What is this?" Roland asked.

"I thought it was just some foul trinket that a witch made, but it's

actually more serious than that.” Barov had to pause to wipe his forehead, “the printed pattern is known as the Devil’s Eye of the Sacred Mountain, which is the emblem of the Witch Cooperation Association.”

Roland rubbed the coin’s uneven surface, he guessed that it was probably fired ceramic. Indeed, he saw that the center of the coin depicted a “mountain” shaped pattern of three triangles juxtaposed with one eye in the centre triangle. The pattern’s contour lines were very rough, he judged that it should’ve been polished by hand.

Roland recalled the two terms “Devil’s Eye of the Sacred Mountain” and the “Witch Cooperation Association”, but wasn’t able to discover any details. It seemed that the fourth prince have had no interest in occultism.

Roland didn’t expect that Barov knew more, but he continued, “Your Highness, you haven’t seen real witches before, so it’s understandable if you think their abilities are exaggerated. Indeed, they can be injured, they’ll even bleed and aren’t any harder to kill than the rest of us, but that’s only for a witch who can’t resist. When they receive the devil’s power it can shorten the lifespan of a witch, but it can also give them terrible power. Ordinary people just can’t match them. Once a witch grows to adulthood, even an army will have to pay a high price to kill her. Their desires are almost impossible to suppress, ultimately causing them to degenerate into the devil’s minions.” The Church therefore declared a Holy Inquisition, If a woman is found to have even a chance to be a witch, they’re to be immediately seized and executed. The King has also approved of this decree and in fact, these measures have been highly effective and the incidents where

witches have wreaked havoc have already greatly declined in comparison to a hundred years ago. The Sacred Mountain, or to say the doorway to hell, is only a rumor illustrated in an ancient book from that era.”

Roland, while gnawing on his bread, sneered again and again as he heard this. Although the histories of this world and the world he knew were very different, their historical trajectories were surprisingly similar. No matter if it was the church in this world or the church he knew from, he thought that religion itself was the devil’s minion, the real source of evil. You don’t think sentencing someone to death only because they are different isn’t evil? Using God’s name to kill someone was all kinds of wrong. Unaware of Roland’s thoughts, Barov continued with his speech, “Recorded in ancient books is that witches can only find real peace at the Sacred Mountain. They wouldn’t have to suffer uncontrollable desires because their magic would have no side effects. There’s no doubt that the so-called Sacred Mountain was certainly the birthplace of evil, an entrance to hell on earth. I think that only hell won’t punish those who’ve fallen for the devil’s temptations.”

“The “League of Allied Witches,” Who are they? What’s their relationship with the Sacred Mountain?” Roland asked.

Barov explained with a sour face, “In the past, everything was good because the witches would run away before the Inquisition arrived and were living in seclusion. But in recent years, the League of Allied Witches appeared and made a difference. They want to gather all of the witches and find the Sacred Mountain. For this purpose, the Witch Cooperation Association will even take the initiative of luring others into becoming a witch. In the last year, many babies disappeared in the Port of Clearwater, and the

rumor was that it was their doing.”

Chapter 3 - The Witch Named Anna (Part II)

Roland swallowed the last piece of fried egg from his breakfast, took a napkin and wiped his mouth before saying, “So you are saying that you are worried that the Witch Cooperation Association will hear the news that the witch did not die and hence will try to rescue her?”

“It is as your Highness has said,” Barov stomped angrily as he exclaimed, “If the prisoner had died it would be bad enough, but now she is still alive! If those witches are even crazy enough to steal babies on the chance they might become future comrades, how far do you think they’d go for someone who has already become a minion of the devil? With how recklessly they behave, attempting a rescue wouldn’t be surprising.”

Roland was confused, he had always felt that there was something amiss about this situation. Why were the Assistant Minister and the Knight Commander so scared of witches?

The woman who should have been hanged was a witch, right? The woman who was so thin it was as if she would fall down when the wind blew? If she really had such a terrible power, why would she need to stand there and wait for death? No, she would not. According to the preaching of the church, she was the devil incarnate, to be executed without trial. Even the army would need to pay a hefty price when going against a witch. However, this “devil” was caught by the normal townspeople of this border town, was tortured, even fitted with a noose, but until now they had not seen a trace of that supposed terrible power.

“How did she get caught?” Roland queried.

“I heard that when the North Mine collapsed, in order to escape, she exposed her identity as a witch and was then captured by angry villagers.” Barov answered.

Roland thought as he listened to Barov, Why do I have the impression that this happened the day before my reincarnation?

“How did she expose herself?” The prince asked aloud.

“I, well... I am not sure,” the assistant minister shook his head and said, “the situation was very confusing, it could be that someone saw her using witchcraft.”

Roland frowned as he asked, “You did not thoroughly investigate the situation?”

“Your Highness, to resume mining was the priority,” the assistant minister protested, “The revenue from that iron mine accounts for half of the production of this town, and the guards confirmed that someone at the scene was killed by witchcraft.”

“What kind of witchcraft?” Roland asked, interested.

“The head and a large part of the body were spread out on the ground as if they were melted. The corpse looked like a used up candle,” the minister said with a look of disgust. “Your Highness, be glad you didn’t see such a scene.”

Roland started playing with a silver fork thoughtfully. Historically, most of the victims of the witch hunts were innocent, tools for the church to maintain control over the populace or possibilities for ignorant townspeople to vent their anger. Sure, a small part of the accused caused their own downfall. The kind of people dressed that oddly while mixing together all sorts of strange material, claiming that they could predict the future and knew the conclusion of life and death.

The truth was those people did figure out some tricks, such as the use of chemical reactions, but then they used that to claim that they had gained the power of the gods.

To modern eyes, these were just some simple chemistry tricks, but in medieval times, those could easily be misrepresented as incredible phenomenon.

As for melting people, the first thing Roland thought of was an acid solution.

But it would be a hassle to prepare those kinds of things, and you would also need to thoroughly soak the body with it, but it wouldn't look like a burned down candle, as for other methods they were out of the question.

Then how did she do it?

If she relied on alchemy, and that was rare, maybe...

Roland thought until there and then said in a determined tone, “Take me to see her.”

The Assistant Minister was shocked for a moment before spluttering, “Sir, you want to see the witch?” Barov stood up in panic, knocked over the cup with the milk which he hadn’t drunk.

“Yes, this is a command.” Roland said looked back and smiled at the assistant minister. He was now really thankful for the fourth prince’s unreasonable style.

Roland went over to the door but suddenly paused, asking, “Right, I have to ask, why would we use the gallows?”

“What?” Barov said.

Roland reiterated his question, “Why would she be hanged? Shouldn’t witches be burned at the stake?”

Barov face seemed puzzled as he asked, “Isn’t it true? But she is not afraid of fire.”

The dungeon was small. This barren land could not afford to have too many prisoners. Most criminals would face trial after a few days and either be released or killed.

In addition to Barov, the Prince was entering the dungeon with the Knight Commander, the prison warden, and two guards.

The dungeon had a total of four levels and the walls were built out of hard granite blocks. It was Roland's first time being at this kind of place and he noted the deeper he got, the narrower the hallway became. The number of cells was also reduced. He thought they probably dug a pit in the form of an inverted cone first, and then build layer after layer out of stone.

This rough project would of course not have a good drainage system. The ground was wet and the muddy sewage was flowing down the stairs, down to the last floor.

Obviously, the witch was at the bottom of the dungeon. Each layer they went down, the stench in the air became thicker.

"Your Highness, you are risking too much by doing this, even though she is sealed with God's Locket of Retribution, it isn't safe."

It was Carter who had spoken. As soon as he knew that the prince was planning on visiting the witch, he immediately went after the prince, advising him all along the road to stop going over. But it was all for naught, even the repeating the direct command of the king not to engage in any dangerous situations had no effect. Obviously, he wasn't only a pretty face, he was also a chatterbox. After being subjected to this for some time, Roland only wished that someone would sew his mouth up. "You must look evil in the eye before you face it on the battlefield and stand toe to toe. I thought you knew that." he said.

“In addition to fighting the evil with courage, it is also important to assess one’s capabilities and act accordingly; reckless behavior is not considered courageous.” Carter rebutted.

“You mean to say that if you ran into an enemy weaker than you, you hold justice, but if he is stronger than you, you will turn a blind eye?” Roland challenged.

“No, Your Highness, I mean ...” Carter stammered.

“Before you were already afraid of a witch raid, and now you are even afraid to see a little girl, my Knight Commander is indeed fearsome.”

Although the knight was a good speaker, he didn’t excel at debate, encountering a smooth talker like Roland he completely lost. Taking advantage of this effort, the group reached the bottom of the dungeon.

This floor was many times smaller than the one above, with a total of only two cells. The warden lit the torches on the walls and as the darkness faded, Roland saw the hunched over witch in a corner of her cell.

It was already late autumn and the temperature in the dungeon was low enough to make people see white fog when they took a breath. He wore a fur coat with silk lining inside, so did not feel cold, but the girl only wore coarse linen that couldn’t even fully cover her body with her arms and feet sticking out and turning

blue.

The suddenly lit up torches made her cringe away with her eyes closed. But soon, she was able to open her eyes and looked straight at them.

It was a pair of pale blue eyes, like a calm lake before the onset of heavy rains. There was no fear on the witch's face and you couldn't see any anger or hatred. Roland saw a vision, it was as if what he saw in front of him was not a weak little girl. Instead, it appeared as if he was in front of a raging flame. He suddenly felt that the torch light from the walls was a little dim.

The girl tried to stand up while leaning against the wall, in slow-motion as if afraid to fall. But in the end, she ultimately stood up and hobbled her way out of the corner, allowing the light to cover her.

Already such a simple movement, yet it made his men suck in several breaths of cold air as they even retreated two steps back, only the Knight Commander could resist and stood in front of Roland.

“What is your name?” Roland asked the witch and patted the knight on the shoulder, indicating that he did not need to be so nervous.

“Anna,” she replied.

Chapter 4 - Flame

“In the end, what happened when the mine collapsed? Can you repeat it for me step by step?” Roland asked.

Anna nodded and began to describe it.

Roland was a bit surprised, he expected her to stay silent or to angrily curse at him, but instead she just responded with, “ask whatever you want,” and obediently told her tale.

It wasn't a complicated story, but a sad one nonetheless. Anna's father was a miner and when the mine collapsed, he was at work. Immediately after they got the news of the collapse, Anna and the other miners' families went over to help rescue their loved ones. The North Mine was previously rumored to be an underground monster lair with many forks in the road, extending in all directions. Since the rescuers were under no unified command, the volunteers separated after arriving at the mine entry so that when Anna found her father, only her neighbours, Susan and Ansgar were by her side.

Anna had discovered that her father's leg was crushed under a full ore cart and he couldn't move, but at his side was another miner patting him down, searching for her father's money. As the looter saw them arrive, he took a pick and rushed at Ansgar and knocked him to the ground, but just at the moment when he was about to strike her, Anna killed him first.

Anna's neighbours vowed that they would never say anything

about this matter, and with their help Anna rescued her father. But before dawn, the next day, Anna's father went out on his crutches and reported to the patrolling guards that his daughter was a witch.

“Why?” Roland, when he had heard up until this point, could not help but ask.

Barov sighed and answered, “Probably so he could receive the gold reward. The discovery and reporting of a witch, can get you 25 gold royals. For a man with a crippled leg, these 25 gold royals are equivalent to what he could earn for half a lifetime of work.”

After a moment of silence, Roland asked, “Your opponent was a strong and grown-up man, how were you able to kill him?”

At this Anna laughed, and the flames of the torches shook, just like high waves on a previously calm lake's surface.

“It was exactly like what you think, I used the power of the devil.” Anna said.

“Shut up! Vile sorceress!” Shouted the warden, but everyone could hear his voice trembling.

“Is that true? I want to see it.” the fourth prince was unmoved by their antics as he calmly said.

“Your Highness, this is no laughing matter!” The Knight

Commander interjected as he furrowed his brows.

Roland stepped out from behind the protection of his knight, step by step moving closer towards the cell as he said, “Everyone who is too afraid of her can leave, I did not ask you to stay here.”

“Don’t panic, she has a ‘God’s Locket of Retribution’ around her neck!” shouted Barov loudly to comfort everyone, but likely also to reassure himself, “No matter how powerful the devil is, he cannot break God’s blessing.”

Standing in front of the prison bars, Roland and Anna were at arm’s length and he could clearly see her dusty and bruised cheek. Her soft facial features showed that she still was a minor, but her expression did not have any traces of childishness. More than that, even anger was hard to find. It was the kind of disharmonious thing Roland had only had seen on TV.

It was the face of a wandering orphan who had suffered from poverty, hunger, cold, etc... but it was not exactly the same, normally in front of the camera the lost children always stood with a bent and beaten down body, their head down, but Anna did not.

From the beginning until now, she had still tried to stand straight with her gaze slightly raised, calmly looking into the prince’s eyes. She did not fear death, Roland realized. Instead, she was waiting for death.

“Is this the first time you have seen a witch, my lord? Your curiosity might get you killed.” Anna said.

“If it was really the power of the devil, you would absolutely not be in this current situation,” Roland responded, “If that were true, it is not I who should fear death, but your father.”

The fires in the prison suddenly became dark, and this was definitely not an illusion, what seemed to be like suppressed flames were soon left with only tight flame clusters. Behind himself, Roland could hear the sound of rapid breathing and prayer, as well as the muffled sound of panicked people accidentally falling down.

Roland’s heartbeat accelerated and he felt himself at an unusual turning point. On one side was the world with common sense, which was in accordance with the laws and constants that he knew, not one thread loose, And on the other side was an incredible new world, which was full of mystery and the unknown. And right now he was standing in front of this world.

Hung on her neck is actually the ‘God’s Locket of Retribution’? What a simple and crude locket, Roland thought. A red iron chain with a sparkling and translucent pendant, if the witch did not have both her hands handcuffed behind her back, couldn’t she use a quick pull to destroy this kind of thing?

Roland glanced at the crowd behind him, who were still mouthing prayers in panic. He quickly reached into the cell, grabbed the pendant, and with a little tug the necklace’s chain snapped and then crashed down broken, the move startled even Anna.

“Come on.” Roland whispered.

Are you in the end, a liar, some type of alchemist, or are you a real witch? If you now take out bottles and jars and start compounding acids, I will be disappointed, Roland thought.

Roland then heard a crackling sound, which was the noise of the thermal expansion of water vapor. Thanks to a dramatic rise in temperature, the water on the ground beneath them had changed to steam.

Roland saw a blazing flame rising directly from Anna’s foot, and then the ground where she stood was burning up. The torches behind them exploded simultaneously, as if they received pure oxygen, in a burst of brilliant light. For a short time, the whole cell was as if it was in daylight, and all this was accompanied by the onlookers’ terrified screams.

When the witch moved forward, the flames surrounding her moved with her. As she came to the edge of her cell, the dozens of iron bars that made up the wall became pillars of fire.

Roland was forced to retreat, the heated air was biting his skin, making him feel pain. In just a few breaths of time, he had escaped from a late autumn summer, no, this was a different kind of heat, this was solely generated by this high-temperature flame and not a full ambient summer heat. One side of his body was facing the flame’s heat, and on the opposite side Roland felt a chill. He could even feel cold sweat trickling down his back.

...She really does not fear fire. Roland thought.

Roland remembered the words of the Assistant Minister. Only now could he really understand the meaning of that sentence.

She is the flame herself, and how could someone fear oneself?

Soon, the iron bars turned from crimson to a light yellow, and they began to melt. This meant that they have been heated to more than fifteen hundred degrees celsius, and achieving this in a condition without any insulating measures, which was far beyond the imagination of Roland. Like others, he had stepped away from the cell, firmly attaching himself to the wall farthest away from the cell.

If he had not done this, the heat produced, enough to melt the iron bars, was enough to kill him even without direct contact, but it was also enough for the clothes to combust, such as Anna's, her prisoner's smock had burnt to ashes and her body was now surrounded by a raging fire.

Roland didn't know how long it lasted, but in the end, the flame completely faded.

The torches were quietly burning on the section of the wall next to them, it seemed like nothing had ever happened. But Anna's burned clothes, the hot air, and the prison bars which looked like as if it was burned by the devil's minions, all this, told everyone that this wasn't an illusion.

In addition to Roland, only the Knight Commander was still standing. The others had collapsed to the ground, the warden was so scared that his pants smelled of urine. Anna was now standing naked outside the cell, her arm shackles were gone. She did not block the view at her naked body, her hands were hanging naturally at her side and her eyes which were blue like the sea were restored to the tranquility from before.

“Now I have satisfied your curiosity, Sir,” she said, “Will you kill me now?”

“No,” Roland stepped forward and wrapped his coat around her and said with a tone as mild as possible, “Miss Anna, I want to hire you.”

Chapter 5 - Reasons

“Second Law of Thermodynamics: Heat can never pass from a colder to a warmer body without some other changes, or it is impossible to convert heat from a single source into useful work without causing other effects, in an irreversible or spontaneous change from one equilibrium state to another the entropy always increases.”

Roland carefully copied this law onto paper, writing in the language of this world. At first glance, the text resembled a moving earthworm. He really did not understand how the locals could learn so many varied and complicated characters.

If you asked him which of the numerous physical laws would be the one to cause most people to feel depressed, Roland would choose the second law of thermodynamics. It tells everyone that this world's heat will always pass from high to low, replacing the disorder into order, increasing the entropy. Eventually, everything will end in nothingness and the universe will become deathly silent.

And this world had broken away from the ever increasing entropy problem. It could make magic out of nothing, which was much more impressive than the theorized invention of a perpetual motion machine! The forces of evil? Roland scoffed and thought to himself that the people of this world did not understand the true nature of this power, and it was so enormous that it could even change the entire universe.

Of course, for a beginning, he could only start to change this

small border town.

Roland hummed a tune, tore up the paper he had written and threw it into the fireplace where it was reduced to ashes, feeling the pleasure of breaking out of a cage.

The assistant minister looked askance at the fourth prince's unexplainable actions, but fortunately for Roland the old 4th Prince had always acted in this manner. In the end, Barov decided that the prince's strange whimsy would pass with no need for him to bother about it, and he could see that the prince was enjoying himself.

"The killing has been completed, the 'witch' was hanged at noon," reported Barov to Roland.

"Good, did anyone see it?" Roland spoke while writing, "No matter, all of the condemned wear hoods."

In order to prevent the Holy Church and the Witch Cooperation Association from knocking at his door, Roland had ordered the dungeon warden to find a person with a similar build within the death-row criminals and let them replace Anna on the gallows. In addition to the Knight Commander and Assistant Minister, everyone who was with him in the dungeon was given hush money consisting of 20 gold royals. This was an enormous windfall for them.

Barov even proposed killing all of the witnesses, or they would never keep their silence forever, but Roland rejected this. He knew

he could not prevent this secret from spreading, but this didn't matter because he actually wanted someone to spread the word, just not now. He would fall out with the church sooner or later anyway, those idiots who promoted the intolerance that caused such a waste of resources! On the other hand, other witches would hear there was a border town in the kingdom where they could live a free life, and could even get preferential treatment, what would these witches think?

No matter what age in time it was, the talent one possessed was the most important thing.

“Then everything is alright,” Roland said, “Next point, for the tariffs, taxes and expenditures of the year, you previously gave me a short summary, let me have a proper look at them. Furthermore, those workshops in the city, the places that make ironware, textiles, pottery and such, you also have to include the numbers and sizes.”

“I'll need three days to prepare these records, but...” Barov said as he first nodded, then paused and looked like he wasn't sure how to continue.

“What is the matter?” Roland asked. He was aware that finally, the moment had come where his ability was about to be tested. Yesterday everything he had done was questioned by the assistant minister because of his doubt in Roland, a scoundrel would always be a scoundrel, but having a bad character didn't mean that they were also brainless. To aid and harbor a witch, in the eyes of the assistant minister, was akin to declaring war on the world.

“Your Highness, I do not understand ...” Barov paused as he wrestled with his words, “In the past, although you made trouble, it was always more harmless, but now ... taking such a significant risk only to save a witch? The law to hunt them down was proclaimed by the Church, and even your father, his Majesty Wimbledon III supports it.”

Roland thought for a moment and then asked, “Do you believe that this border town is a good place to live?”

“Uh, this ...” Barov did not understand what this question had to do with the problem, after some time he gave his true opinion, “No.”

“It is awful, compared to Valencia, the City of Golden Harvests or the Port of Clearwater, what do you feel my chances are of winning the rights to the throne against my siblings?”

“...” The assistant minister opened his mouth but didn’t answer.

“Almost zero. So I can only choose to walk another path,” Roland continued as he watched expressionlessly as Barov took one step after another into the trap he laid down. “The kind of road that would even impress my father.”

He did not state the point that the witches were not inherently evil because to do so would have little success. Barov had been the Assistant Minister of Finance for twenty years and was regarded as a competent politician. For politicians, their personal gains were usually more important than the moral law of good and evil. Also

taking the emotional route was not suitable for him, as Roland recalled the previous prince's actions, he found out that he really couldn't be considered as an upright and righteous person. So he chose to play on the eternal conflict between religious and secular authority, as the expanding power of the Holy Church was a constant thorn in the side of Wimbledon III.

The Church claimed that the world worked in accordance with the will of God, and the pope was the voice of God. If the people found what he said weren't the truth, even full of lies, the dominance of the Holy Church would be greatly shaken.

With the phrase, "the witch is not evil, so I want to save her," it would be hard to convince the assistant minister, but replaced with "she is not an evil witch, and I can use this to attack the church," Barov could easily be persuaded to accept this conclusion.

"Regardless of how the territories of my brothers and sisters flourished, it was a foregone conclusion that everything would end in the possession of the church. They had already stepped on the divine right of kings, if only the pope can be considered as rightful ruler, then are they the actual rulers of this land or are we?" Roland paused for just the right amount of time before going on, "Even my father will have to place his hope in me: A leader who isn't suppressed by the Holy Church, one who holds all the exclusive rights of a royal king, his choice would be very clear."

Changing the "enemy of the entire world" into "only the enemy of the Church" was easier to accept for many people, not to mention Barov, who was himself standing on the side of the royal family.

“In the same way, if he is aware of the extraordinary abilities they have, that they can pry open the grip of the Holy Church, the execution orders will be nothing more than a paper joke. While there is no possibility to guarantee success, it’s not impossible either. Do you think I’m worth the risk?” Roland stared at the assistant minister while saying these sentences in a row, “Do not falter now, Barov. You’ve been an assistant minister for twenty years, right? If I can become Wimbledon IV, the word assistant will be removed, or even further, something like... becoming the Hand of the King is possible, hmm? ”

Looking at Barov’s back who was leaving, Roland felt relieved. It was easy to see that he didn’t think much of his promise, this was normal, even Roland himself did not believe that this just recently scraped together plan, which was made up out of hubris could be realized. But that was not important, the key was to let Barov believe that he really thought that way. A sheltered noble’s son could only think of a simple plan, not to mention that the 4th Prince really hated the mentality of the church. At this time, the way to attract more witches was also paved.

As for his real thoughts? Even if Barov knew them, he wouldn’t be able to understand them.

Roland summoned the maid, “Call Miss Anna and tell her she should come to see me.”

Roland happily thought that the following business would be the

best.

Chapter 6 - Training (Part I)

In the rear castle gardens stood a single cottage, surrounded by a wooden fence. The cottage was built out of clay bricks and the ground was filled with loess, a mixture of sand, silt and clay. There was also a pond in front of the cottage with a circumference of roughly nine and a half yards and with the pond filled with an appropriate amount of river water, this environment was not only difficult to burn but also had a certain manufactured feel, it seemed to be taken right out of a dream. Piled atop the ground were several iron ingots, these came from the blacksmith and were placed there by Carter.

The pond was very charming, Roland had immediately taken a fancy to this place, but as for a laboratory, this place was still too crude. Roland shook his head, realizing that using some random materials and having them build a perfect lab was not possible. If he could find a suitable place in the future and collected all the resources, he would get Barov to start making him a workshop.

Calling Anna over, who had been resting in the cottage, Roland asked, “How are you? Did you sleep well?”

Looking at the bewildered Anna who emerged, Roland smiled.

The witch Roland saw now and the witch he saw yesterday looked like two completely different people. After a thorough cleaning, her long flaxen hair draped over her shoulders like a shawl and had a soft and shiny luster. Although her skin hadn't been maintained due to her rough life as a commoner her youth made up for it, and the light dusting of freckles which were on the

bridge of her nose added a youthful vitality to her face. Her body was still thin and looked as if a strong breeze could push her down, but her cheeks with a rosy color and the bruises and marks on her neck were much faded from yesterday. Roland suspected that witches received an improvement of their physical capabilities in addition to their magic. At least Anna's recovery rate had to be much faster than the average person's.

“Originally, since you experienced so many terrible things, you should be allowed to rest a few days, however our need at this time is very urgent, so I'll compensate you later,” Roland said before telling the girl to turn around in a circle. “This dress, does it fit well?”

Anna now wore clothes he had carefully selected from a variety of styles, all in order to satisfy his lewd tastes. The full protective clothing that the iron workers wore was too thick and not suitable for her, while the robes many mages wore in games appeared to be elegant and classy, in real life they restricted the mobility of the wearer and would quickly be turned to ashes. As for maid dresses, hey, is there any better clothing than this?

Even if this world had no modern maid outfits yet it was not a big problem, the usual maid clothes were what the later generations were based on after all. So Roland directly took a set of clothes from Tyre and cut it to Anna's size, shortened the skirt, changed the long sleeves to short sleeves, made the the round neck collar become folded and then tied it into a bow, thereby creating the new witch uniforms.

This was matched with a witch hat (customized), black boots

(ready), as well as a knee length cape (ordered). In the past, Roland could only see this type of costume in a movie, but right now, one stood in front of him, looking so much like a witch from earth lore.

“Your Highness, you ... What do I need to do for you?” Anna asked.

Anna really could not keep up with the ideas of the great man in front of her, she felt that she was losing her ability to judge the situation. Being dragged out of the dungeon with a bag over her head, she believed she would soon be liberated of her cursed life. But after taking off the headgear, Anna found herself not seeing the gallows or the guillotine, but a magnificent room. Then a bunch of people flooded in, undressing and bathing her. From her armpits to toes, nothing was left unpolished.

Next, it was the dressing room, Anna did not expect that she would have needed all these dresses to serve someone. She also never knew that clothes could actually be so comfortable, as they laid gently on her body, it was possible to feel the slightest friction.

Finally, a white-bearded old man had entered the room, and after he ordered everyone else to step out, he had placed a contract in front of her. At this moment Anna realized, the man who had said he wanted to hire her in the dungeon was actually this kingdom's 4th Prince. When he said he wanted to employ her, it was not a joke. The contract clearly stated that if she worked for the prince, she would be paid a gold royal every month.

Of course, Anna knew what receiving a gold royal a month meant, her father, who had worked in the mine all day, had

his pay determined by the amount of ore he was able to mine, but the best haul he ever had was only worth one silver royal. One hundred silver royals could be converted to a gold royal, and even this depended on the purity of the silver royals. So, was her job to accompany the prince while sleeping? When she was bathing, Anna had heard the maids whispering, but she didn't think she was worth this price. With her blood tainted by the devil, she was a person full of filthiness. After she was exposed, everyone knew her real identity, even if the prince's curiosity was compelling to this extent, even if he did not fear the devil, he did not need to pay her any remuneration at all.

That night, however, no one came, and she fell asleep peacefully. It was the softest bed Anna had ever slept in, so she just laid down and immediately fell asleep. The next day when she opened her eyes it was already noon, lunch had already been served in her room, delivered were bread with cheese and meats. Before, she had obviously been ready to die. She had even decided to willingly give up her life to atone for her "sins." Those were her original thoughts, but after tasting the luxurious meal, Anna could not help it, tears started running down.

Sauces and seasonings were mixed within her mouth, a strong hint of a spicy flavour mingled with a sweet taste, attacking, again and again, her taste buds... Suddenly, she felt that the world was a little bit brighter.

Anna felt that if she could eat this food every day, then even if demons attacked her body, she would have more courage to resist, right?

Now standing in this garden which resembled an old temple, nothing like her prison cell, Anna secretly made up her mind. Since the other party needed her, so whether it was to wear strange clothes, or even using the incredible devil's power, she was willing to try. So she repeated her question, but this time, she did not hesitate.

“Your Highness, what do you need me for?”

“Right now, I want you to learn to control your own strength, try it over and over until you can send out your flames and receive them back freely.”

“You mean the devil's-”

“No, no, Miss Anna,” Roland interrupted her, “This is your power.” The witch blinked with her eyes, her beautiful, big blue eyes.

“Most people in the world have the misconception that the powers of the witches belong to the devil, that they are incredibly evil, when, in fact, they are wrong,” Roland bent his body down and met her eyes with his own on an equal level. “But you already figured that out, right?”

Roland remembered Anna's chuckle in the dungeon, would a person who felt they were evil have laughed with such self-mockery?

“I did not use my power to hurt anyone else,” she murmured, “Except for that looter.”

“Self-defence is not a sin, you did the right thing. People fear you because they do not understand you, they only know that with training witches can become strong fighters, but they do not know how to become a witch. Unknown power is always scary. “

“You’re not afraid,” Anna said.

“Because I know your power belongs to you,” Roland laughed, “but if that looter had such an incredible strength, I wouldn’t calmly stand in front of him.”

“Well, let’s get started,” he said.

Chapter 7 - Training (Part II)

The fire rose up from under her feet but soon faded away.

This was already her twenty-third attempt.

And she had failed again.

On Anna's forehead beads of sweat constantly arose, but she just used the back of her hand to swipe them away, and the crackling sound of rising flames immediately sounded out again.

With no stops to rest, the end of an exercise was followed by the start of the next one. The witch uniform lied at the side, neatly folded, If Anna had not insisted on doing so, her new uniform would have already been burned to ashes.

Fortunately, with Roland's identity as the 4th prince, getting a few spare robes for her to use was not difficult. He had his maid Tyre deliver a whole bucket of robes, gathered by the maids for Anna to use.

The twenty-fourth practice had finally been effective, the flame was no longer rising from her feet. Instead, it appeared on her hand. She gingerly moved her arm, to try and have the flame go to her fingertips, but the flame suddenly shook twice and rose up her arm setting her sleeve on fire, even spreading from the sleeve to engulf the whole robe.

Anna dismissed the flame but her robe was already completely burnt, so she turned to the bucket and got a new one.

This wasn't the first time this had happened, but whenever it did Roland would look away, so that his eyes were staring at other places, even if Anna herself didn't care about it.

As a matter of fact, if it weren't for Roland's strong objections, she would probably have taken off all her clothes and practiced in the nude, in broad daylight! But even if Roland were to get a good view of her great figure that way, he wouldn't be able to calmly work with a naked girl, especially when the girl turned into flames and her body gave off an entirely different kind of charm.

Roland shook his head, leaving his dirty thoughts behind. For the moment, it seemed that it was not easy to master the power of magic. The actual goal he had set for Anna was that she should control the flame to such a degree that she could release her flames from her palm or her fingers without destroying her own clothes. However, he also wanted the flames to have a high enough temperature to melt the iron ingots that were in the yard.

After Anna's thirtieth attempt had failed but before she could make the next one Roland stopped her and told her to take a break.

Anna looked at him in a startled fashion but she gave no other response.

Roland had to walk over, he even had to pull the girl by her hand, leading her to the chair and forcing her to sit down.

“You are tired; when you are tired you should rest. Do not be too impatient, we still have some time.” He helped her wipe the sweat off of her moist forehead and said, “let us consume an early afternoon tea.”

Roland knew that the nobility of the Kingdom of Greycastle did not have the habit of drinking afternoon tea and this world's productivity was so poor, for ordinary people it was hard to have the opportunity to taste such delicate food. The people in this world were not familiar with three meals a day, not to mention a fourth meal. As for the noble sons, they generally gathered together around this time to have some fun in bars or casinos.

The prince himself had to temporarily take over for the maid and cook if he wanted to create the custom here since they weren't familiar with it. Since he had to prepare some light refreshments and they didn't have any tea he was forced to substitute ale, it would be important to get some tea in the future..

So in the castles rear gardens, in a wooden cottage, the first afternoon tea party of the Greycastle Kingdom was held.

Anna looked at the dishes of exquisite snacks, not believing her eyes. Since when could something to eat look so good?

Although she did not know the specific name of the cake she ate, it was pure white in appearance, and the bright red collection of fruit could make people feel their appetite increasing. Especially seeing the edges of the pastry decorated in an exquisite pattern, all

of this forced her to change her worldview once again.

Roland proudly observed Anna's bewildered expression, she looked like a country bumpkin, but also slightly frightened. Although the strawberries on the cream cake were marinated in sugar and didn't even taste fresh, there was nothing left of the cake.

Roland found that appreciating the witch's face while she ate was more satisfying than doing so himself. Roland watched Anna, who was carefully placing the cake into her mouth, her blue eyes almost releasing a ray of light, and her hair gently swaying in the wind. Seeing all this his heart suddenly nearly burst and he thought to himself, It's not good to cook anything worse!

Well, the cultivation of feelings as well as talent was also very important.

Watching Anna while she practiced and accompanying her to enjoy the afternoon tea became Roland's daily life, not showing any interest in the government affairs. Barov helped him to take care so that everything was clear and orderly.

Three days later, Barov delivered the information of the border town's industry that he had asked for to Roland's office. This was an absolutely unbelievable moment, the former fourth Prince actually had never the patience to see such a big pile of complicated reports.

As a matter of fact, even now he didn't have it. Roland needed

only to read two lines of text until he he started to feel dizzy, and he directly said to Barov, “You will read it to me.”

He spent an hour listening to Barov until he found a mistake, “Why were the border town’s annual winter taxes and trade revenues zero?”

Since the winter temperatures were low, the decline in the harvest could be understood, but what was the meaning of directly returning to zero, had the local people the habit of hibernation?

Barov coughed, “Sir, did you forget? In the winter months it’s the time of the ‘Months of the Demons’, the town has no ability to guard its borders, all the residents must evacuate to Longsong Stronghold. But rest assured, your safety is certainly the first priority.”

“Months of the Demons?” Roland seemed to recall having heard that phrase before. He didn’t take the take of ghosts and the legends of wicked witches seriously, he considered it as part of this uncivilized world’s nonsense. But now it seems that the monsters are not a fantasy since the witches actually do exist. Then... what about the other famous legends like ghosts?

When he got his education as a noble his history tutor had explained the “Month of the Demons” in detail. Every winter, after the first snow fell and the sun had gone behind the mountains, an intense darkness without light would descend. At that moment the gates of hell would open.

The evil spirits from hell would corrupt living creatures, and turn them into the slaves of the devil. Some of the animals would change into powerful demon beasts with only one goal, to attack humans. Most witches were born in this season, and their power would be far stronger than usual because of it.

“Have you seen them? The Gates of Hell,” Roland asked.

“Your Highness, how can ordinary people go see them?” Barov shook his head again and again, “don’t say nonsense, the mountains they come from cannot be conquered, even being close to the mountains you will be affected by the foul miasma, first getting a mild headache, and then in severe cases even losing your mind. Unless.....”

“Unless what?”

“Unless the person doing it is a witch. Only a witch can go and see the Gates of Hell because they have fallen from grace and became the devil’s minions. Naturally they don’t need to fear the touch of evil. Mentioning witches, Barov glanced in the direction of the garden.

“The demonic monsters, have you ever seen one?” Roland knocked on the table to recapture the assistant minister’s attention.

“Well, I haven’t see them. Like your highness, this is my first time coming to the kingdom’s borders. In the center of the country, in the castle, only a few people would have encountered

the real demons.”

If he needed to evacuate once a year how would he be able to develop this place? He initially thought that the border town was a barren land, but that it still had the potential for development, but now it seemed to be a pipedream.

“When we resist the demonic beasts in Longsong Stronghold, when they aren’t invincible and when they can be killed, then why can’t we defeat them in this border town as well?”

“Longsong Stronghold has a high wall. Also, the Duke Ryan’s elite troops are stationed there. It is nothing like this border town, this small place definitely cannot be compared to it,” Barov explained, “from the start, the establishment of the border town was to provide an early warning to the stronghold. Therefore the town was set between the slope of the North Mountain and the Chishui River.”

So, his town was only cannon fodder to block the enemy. The only path they could cross, Roland laughed grimly as he heard this.

Chapter 8 - Months Of The Demons (Part 1)

If Roland wanted to develop his territory well, he had to build strong roots in this place. Even though this land was a wasteland it could be easily reclaimed, when the territory was too small it could be expanded outwards, but all talk was useless if the people weren't willing to stay.

If they could be forced to abandon a plot of land at any time, then who would be willing to purchase it? Who would want to improve its production?

After the assistant minister left, Roland called in Knight Commander Carter and ordered, "Assemble your men, go and find some of the local guards, hunters and farmers, they must have lived here for more than five years, and experienced the Months of the Demons. If there is someone who can fight it would be even better."

After the knight saluted and left, Roland rubbed his forehead, continuing to look at the data compiled by the Assistant Minister.

The main exports of the border town were from mining and hunting, and the bulk of the imports were food items. Everything would be transported through Longsong stronghold or directly through the Chishui River in Willow town.

The mining exports contained all kinds of minerals, like iron, copper, sulfur, rock crystal, ruby, sapphire... This was completely against the concept of associated minerals. He thought of what

Anna had said to him, that the North Mine had been rumored to be an unknown underground lair, until now there was no proven bottom to the mine and it was also unknown how many forks the mine had.

The minerals exported by the town weren't paid for with the kingdom's gold royals, instead they were paid for with the foodstuffs that arrived. It stands to reason that, since the gems could be regarded as a high priced luxury, that in these last five years the border town could save a surplus of grain, but in the end there was no surplus.

In other words, the annual output of the mining of the border town was only enough for two thousand people's yearly rations. Before the prince arrived here, the border town was governed by the duke who also took charge of Longsong stronghold, and he had set up this arrangement. In his point of view, he could save food and had a warning for the monsters.

The fur trade was part of the local people's own proceeds, they ventured into the westward forest, hunted some birds and other animals, maybe sold them to the Longsong Stronghold, or to the residents of the small town of Willowleaf. Because of this, no transaction would be made in the border town and so, no tax could be collected.

Roland thought, since he came, it couldn't go on in this way; the minerals could no longer be paid for with food. The Chishui river ran through the whole kingdom, and the traffic was not blocked. There was a transportation artery, even if we would no longer buy food from the Longsong Stronghold, there were still other places

to provide them.

This was all built on the premise that he could stay here in the Border Town, blocking those damn monsters.

Carter worked quickly, by the next day he had found two local guards and a hunter and reported, “These two men are from the town patrol, every year they are responsible for lighting the beacon. The hunter said he and the demons had crossed paths, he returned with a demon beast head, which he cut off with his own hands.”

The three people bowed simultaneously.

Roland nodded, permitting them to stand up; one of them stepped forward to speak.

“Honor... respected prince... Your highness”, the first guard who was called up, was too nervous to even speak clearly, “Brian and I are... are the people, uh... When it begins to snows, we... We will go to the north slope of the mining area... to the Beacon Tower. There, it's first possible... it is the first point to see the demon movements, if they cross over in great numbers... we will conceal ourselves in the forest... ignite the flames, from childhood... The road we will withdraw at and the boat is prepared previously... then we leave.”

“Since you both were together, let your partner answer it”, Roland covered his face to hide his disapproval, “the demon beasts, can they be killed? ”

The other guard was also very nervous, but at least he did not stammer, “Your Highness, it should be so. They were just ordinary animals in the forest, but through the influence of the evil miasma they become manic and ferocious, but they can still be killed. Every Months of the Demons in the past, Longsong Stronghold would sent cavalry, cleansing the land from the stronghold to Border Town of the remnants of the demon monsters. ”

“The Months of the Demon last how long?” Roland asked.

“Generally two to three months..... it depends on the sun, “said Brian.

“Depends on the sun?” Roland asked doubtfully.

“Yes,” the guard explained, “Your Highness came to this town not long ago , so you do not know. In this Border town, once the snow begins to fall it will not stop, until the sun shines again, then the snow will be gone.”

“So the snow indicates the end of the Months of the Demon?” Roland recalled that at least in Graycastle it was not like this, basically the next day it would end to snow, also the sun would seem to be different .

“It is exactly like this, the longest time I experienced the Months of the Demon was two years ago, that lasted nearly four months, many people starved.”

“Why, shouldn’t be the grain reserves in Longsong stronghold be large enough to support the town?” Roland asked.

Brian’s face got a little angry, “They had enough. But Reynolds the municipal administrator who is responsible for managing such things declared that the amount of ore and minerals mined was only enough to buy food for three months, for the fourth month we had to deliver a new shipment of ore. But the Months of the Demons had not ended, we couldn’t leave the fortress.”

“So that was what happened ... I got it.”

They were simply alienating the fool people. If Longsong stronghold treats these people who were living on the frontier with this kind of warmth like a spring wind, the frontiersmen would most likely want to stay and not leave, but at the moment it seems that the group of people behind Longsong stronghold were not the good natured sort. Roland beckoned the last person forward to answer, while putting the name of the administrator into his heart.

The third man looked courageous and strong, with a height of over 6 feet making Roland feel great pressure. Fortunately, he came forward on his knees.

“You said you killed the beast?”

“Yes sir,” his voice was low and hoarse, “a wild boar species and a wolf species.”

“Species”?” Roland repeated, “what do you mean?”

“This is the name of the demonic beast, your highness. The more fierce the variation of the animals was before, the more difficult it would be to deal with variation after. And they will emphasize the advantages of the body. The wild boar, it’s back fur would become extremely tough, even within a range of 50 yards it would be difficult to hurt it with a crossbow. The wolf species becomes more cunning, the running speed becomes amazing, to kill it, you need to set up the trap in advance.”

“Stronger would become stronger and faster even faster,” Roland nodded as he heard this, “But they are still animals.”

“They are, but they are not the most terrible kind of enemy,” the hunter said until here and then he had to swallow his saliva, before he was able to talk further, “The worst ones are the mixed species.”

“They are devils incarnate, only hell is able to create such a horrible monster. I have seen a hybrid. It had not only beast like strong limbs, but on his back was even a pair of huge wings, allowing it to fly short distances. And it always knew where I was, no matter how much I tried to hide, it could always detect me. It was not hunting its prey, your highness, it was just teasing the prey.” The hunter Liehu lifted his clothes, showing a large scar extending from the abdomen to his chest as he said, “I lost my consciousness and fell into the Chishui River, I was lucky to survive.”

“Such a monster exists,” Roland felt that the world became more and more like a fantasy; a strong wall can block all ordinary kinds of demonic beasts, but if they could fly what should he do? “Mixed species should be very rare, right?”

Chapter 9 - Months Of The Demons (Part 2)

“Not many, Your Highness,” the hunter replied. “During every Months of the Demons there will only appear two to three mixed species demons, otherwise Longsong Stronghold would be in huge trouble.”

“Well, you seem to be very observant,” Roland ordered the man to stand up and asked, “what’s your name? You don’t look like a man from my Kingdom of Graycastle.”

“Half of my lineage hails from the Mojin Clan, the townspeople call me Iron Axe.”

Mojin Clan, the people from the Shamin Kingdom, located southwest of the barren lands, it was said that they were the descendants of giants. Roland searched within his brain for any memories related to the Mojin Clan and realized that Iron Axe did not use the name his clan called him by, rather using the name given by the people of Border Town, and apparently he did not want to have a relationship with the Shamin Kingdom. As for why, since it was obvious that he was from the southwestern border of the desolate lands, he estimated, that there were a series of sad stories involved.

But for the moment those stories weren’t important; everyone was welcome in Border Town, regardless of his or her background.

Roland clapped his hands, “That’s not why I asked you to be here, Carter, bestow each of them with ten silver royals, then they

can leave.”

“Thank you very much for the reward, Your Highness,” said the three in unison.

Afterwards the people were taken away by Carter. When he had finished his task, Carter returned once again and asked, “Your Highness, why did you ask them these questions? Do you want to stay here?”

Roland didn’t express any opinion and instead asked, “What do you think?”

“This matter is out of question, Your Highness!” Said the knight loudly, “According to the statement from the hunter, even a wild demon bear would be difficult to cope with. Outside of fifty yards a shot with a crossbow would have no effect; we would have to wait until it closed to forty yards, or even until thirty yards before making our shot, only our elite soldiers can accomplish this. Plus the demons are too numerous, and we can’t rely on strong walls, only standing side by side with the local guards to stop them. I’m afraid that the casualties would outstrip the accomplishments, our defeat would be assured.”

“You already saw what a witch is able to do, so why can’t you think positively?” Roland sighed.

“This... The witches are evil, but Anna... Miss Anna does not look so, as your Knight Commander, I have to seek truths by looking for facts.”

“If I would give you a city wall, would you think it will be possible?”

“What?” For a moment Carter suspected that he had heard wrong.

“If I give you a wall, between the north slope of the mountain and the Chishui River,” Roland stressed every word he said, “Although they would not be like the enormous walls from Graycastle, but to stop animals, they should still be able to.”

“Sir, do you know what you are saying?” The knight didn’t know whether to be angry or to laugh, “Even your nonsense should have a limit, if you don’t stop, you will have to excuse my lack of manners.”

“We still have three months, don’t we? I looked at the past records, the first snow usually falls here at the end of the second month from now.”

“Even if we had three years it would not be enough! Building a wall would require many workers, for setting the foundation they have to compress the earth and every one or two feet would have to be reinforced; otherwise it would have a high risk to collapse. This would be the simplest of the earthen walls,” Carter shook his head again and again, “brick and stone walls are even more difficult to build and it would need hundreds of masons who would first have to cut the stones or bake the clay into bricks. Afterwards they would need to build it block by block. Your highness, all walls were

built this way, without exception. A city being built in the time of a day and a night, that is only the stuff of legends.”

Roland indicated he had heard enough, “I see. You don’t need to be so upset, if there is no reliable wall in place, I will evacuate with you to Longsong stronghold. I’m not going to give away my life in this place.”

The knight knelt down, “I will protect you!”

Afterwards in the beautiful castle gardens, Roland nipped at his bitter ale. Looking at Anna who was intently eating cream cakes, his mood recovered a lot.

He had decided to stop the demonic beasts at the Border town – joining the elite soldier with the town guards, he would also include the farming location by expanding the area the guards patrolled. If he wanted to build the wall, connecting the north slope of the mountain and the Chishui River within three months, he must use an appropriate technology from the modern times.

It was not the case that Roland had suddenly thought of this, previously he had checked the edges of the Border town (although he didn’t go personally), in his memory remained a clear picture — the northern slope of the mountain and the Chishui River were only separated by 600 yards at their closest point, it was a natural bottleneck. And due to the all year round mining in the North Mine, it was surrounded by rock gravel mined from the cave.

These gravel cast offs were ash gray, containing plenty of calcium

carbonates, which could be used as limestone after grinding. With the limestone he had his solution, it would be equal to cement.

Yes, this would change the history of mankind, to be able to build with a water hardening material, with raw materials which were easily to obtain, which were simple to prepare, it truly numbered among one of the most efficient tools for tilling the fields.

Roland estimated the needed time, even if he would implement new technology, even with cement he wasn't sure if it was possible, the amount of cement they actually needed was too big, he wasn't sure if they could calcine so much cement powder within three months. And concrete toughness would be inferior, in the end they would need to reinforce it with steel, thus the probability to succeed in building a concrete city wall was not that great.

They had to maximize the usage of the existing materials and save cement, so building a fieldstone wall would be the most appropriate choice.

The so-called fieldstone, was a stone which had not undergone any grinding, it was just a natural byproduct of mining. This stone, because of the irregular shape of the edges and corners, there was no way to directly using it to build, instead it first need to be processed by the stonemason into usable bricks. But building a fieldstone wall while using cement as binder was possible, regardless of how oddly shaped the stone was it could be used, the gap between the stones was filled by the cement, saving cement and using leftover materials.

With this the big direction was set, but the actual

implementation, he was afraid he would have to do it by himself, thought Roland. Regardless of whether it was the calcined cement or fieldstone wall, both were new things. Except for himself, no one had seen these things, and also no one knew how to make them. He was afraid he would be very busy for the next three months.

“You, look here.”

The sound of Anna’s clear voice came from behind him.

As Roland turned, he saw a small cluster of flames in her palm quietly burning, there was clearly no wind, but the flame tip was rising up and down, as if it would nod to her. She shook her finger, and the fire was like a toddler, moving slowly towards the tip of the finger. In the end, it stood at the top of the index finger, simmering down.

“You did it.”

It was an incredible scene, Roland felt admiration from the bottom of his heart. This was not illusion magic, nor a chemical trick, but it really was a supernatural power. But this was not the most attractive thing to Roland – many time more dazzling than the flame, was Anna’s look.

While she was intently staring at her fingertips, the lake water limpid eyes were reflecting the vibrant flame, as if an elf sealed within a sapphire. The traces left from the prison torture had already faded, though she rarely smiled, but her face was no longer

lifeless. On the young lady's tip of her nose was a speck of sweat, the rosy color on her white cheeks emitted vitality, even looked at also can let a person feel cheerful mood.

“What happened to you?”

“Ah... Nothing,” Roland noticed he looked at her for too long, he removed his gaze and coughed.” well, then, try using it to melt the iron.”

In the past few days, except for eating and sleeping, she always repeated her practice, in front of the hardworking enthusiast Roland could only endlessly blush in shame — even in the face of the college entrance examination he did not work so hard.

“Apparently she will not need long, until she completely grasps this power,” Roland thought. Following that, his ideas of new projects can be set on the agenda.

Chapter 10 - The Stonemason

This week, the weather wasn't good, the sky was always gray, Karl van Bate's mood was like the weather, gloomy to the extreme.

Walking on the wet stone street, from time to time there were people greeting him. In in this town, Karl run a school. At Graycastle those noble children with the talent to go to school, attended a different kind of college, here he was also teaching for the children of ordinary people. Therefore, in this border town, he had a very high reputation.

“Hey, Mr. van Bate, good morning.”

“Sir, is my son doing all right?”

“When are you free, Karl, let's go fishing together.”

At ordinary times Karl would always smile and would respond to them, but today he just nodded, never saying a word.

Since he witnessed the hanging of Anna, in his eyes the world appeared to be flawed – or to say since his departing from Graycastle a crack seems to be rising into existence, but he deliberately turned a blind eye. He used his busy work to numb himself, and to a certain extent, he even used the innocent smile of the students, to cover this crack.

Until Anna died, he thought, that the world had not changed. But

after the hanging, the crack not only did not disappear, but it expanded.

Regarding Anna, he recalled the memories of the previous half a year. Within the more than thirty children in her class she stood not out, with a normal appearance, she was never a person of many words, but there was something that let Karl felt a little impressed.

That was her passion for knowledge. No matter what they would teach, characters or history, she could always remember it on her first try. Even if it was the boring history and evolution of the religion, she was always seen holding a book. He had seen the young lady help to take care of her neighbor's sheep, sitting down in the sun, Anna would carefully brush the sheep's hair, gently, like someone would do it with a baby. The picture he could still remember very clearly was the sweet smile of a happy girl, no matter what or how he could not think of her as a sinister and evil person.

Later there was a fire at her place, and Anna's mother unfortunately passed away, afterwards Anna never came back to college. He never saw her again, until a week ago, when she was proved to be a witch and hanged in the town square.

Be tempted by the devil? An unclean person? Evil? All fart! In his heart, he had for the first time doubts about the Holy Church, for the first time he doubted the knowledge they imparted.

Whether or not Anna was a witch, he didn't knew, but she would never turn evil! If a yet to mature girl, a girl ignorant of the world

and full of curiosity could be called evil, then the administrative officials of Graycastle were from hell and possessed by the devil too! In order to save several hundreds of gold royals, they deliberately stole stone material in exchange, leading to the collapse of the half-finished theater building; more than thirty masons of their guild had died.

But were they hanged? Not even one! The judge finally ruled that the leader of the stonemasons was unsuitable for his job, he was punished into exile, the stonemasons were forced to disband.

And Carl, who knew the insight story, fled out of the limelight and left Graycastle, he followed the road into the west, eventually ending in the border town.

He managed to establish a college, with a lot of students, he already got to know the new neighbors, he found new friends, but the crime from the officers of Graycastle was always engraved in his mind. Now, once again he felt the world was mocking him-what was evil, the gods of heaven could they really see it clearly?

The last overwhelming straw for Karl was Nana.

Nana and Anna were nothing alike; one could even say they were the complete opposite. She was a very lively girl, quite well known in the college. Only seldom attending class, and when she was there, she could never pay attention, only lying in the grass. If you asked what she did, she would giggle for a while, and then she would answer that she was looking at a fight between a grasshopper and ants.

Nana's face was always full of laughter; it seemed to be her nature. The evil world had nothing to do with her, at least in the college, she could always be happy and was able to laugh. Karl was even a little curious – if she had ever cried since she was born.

Until two days ago, when suddenly, with a long face, Nana came to find him, “teacher, will I be hanged too, like Anna?”

This let him know, his student, Nana had become a witch.

“Ah, isn't that Teacher? Come over here and help us to look at what it says.”

Karl felt as if someone had pulled his sleeve. He looked up and found that he had arrived at the town square. Many people stood around the board and shouted, that someone should let them know what the announcement said, hearing van Bate's name, everyone consciously get out of his way.

“Teacher, you coincidentally came, help us to look at it.”

“You are right, originally it was Meg who would read this to us, but the end result was, that before he could tell it to us, he got stomachache and had to go to the toilet, until now he did not come back.”

Like always, he nodded with a smile, then he explained in detail the content of the bulletin board to everybody who listened. But at

the present Karl discovered it was impossible — the smiles and enthusiasm of these people was not fake, but for him it was, but seeing this, it became more and more intolerable to wear the fake mask himself.

The post of the hanging of Anna was placed above the notice, everyone was cheerily discussing about it. In a sense, you were her murderer; he could say it only in his own heart, your ignorance and fear had killed her.

Karl had to swallow down his emotion, took a deep breath and walked to the front of the announcement list.

“The prince called for hands to help with the construction of new buildings for the border town, a variety of different kinds of jobs is available,” he said.

But I am also one of her killers, and what qualifications do I have to blame them? The one who told them that witches were evil, was it not me? Karl had a bitter taste in his mouth, look, everything they knew I have taught them, word by word the Holy Church doctrine, I always thought I taught well, to hell with it!

“Stone grinder, they have to be male, from 20 years to 40 years old and healthy. Payment, 25 bronze royals per day.”

Mud craftsmen, not limited to gender, over 18 years old, they should have experience in masonry, the daily payment would be 45 bronze royals.”

“Handyman, requiring to be men, 18 years of age or older, 12 bronze royals per day.”

“.....”

No, he had to do something, if Anna’s death has been irreparable, then at least he couldn’t let Nana die. Karl heard his inner voice shouting, “the Mason guild collapsed when you did not stand up, Anna was hanged when he did not stand up, do you like what happened when you held silence, helplessly looking at these lovely child, when she would be sent to the gallows?”

But what could he do? Could he flee with Nana out of Border Town? He had his own family, a family who traveled with him from Graycastle, just when there lives got better would they need to leave again? Even Nana herself, who was born into a rich family, would she leave her fixed place of life?

Stonemason, not limited to gender, age is not limited, preferred are people who participated in building for the municipal administration, like the stronghold, or other fortifications, the city hall recruit for long term , with monthly remuneration of 1 gold royal.”

“Additional Term: People with rich experience and excellent performance, could get granted an official position.”

After reading the notice, the people become even more noisy, “paid monthly 1 gold royal, this is even better than the payment for the stronghold cavalry!”

“Will you go? Can you build a fortress?”

“You, just don’t only stare at this, go get a job, every day you would get payed for the work, count together you would not get much less than with hunting.”

“Indeed, when going to hunt it is possible to lose one’s own life and when you have to dodge it is also possible to get lost.”

Karl van Bate did not pay attention to this; he concentrated on the seal and signature on the final notice. It was the autograph from Roland Wimbledon, the fourth prince.

Did the prince not know, that the Month of the Demons was already coming? Whatever he wants to build, at the moment it’s not a good time to start. It seems his Highness knew nothing about constructions, provided that oneself could become the stonemasons, would he then brought to his attention Karl had suddenly an idea, perhaps through this recruitment, he could see the prince himself, the highest ruling in Border town.

This thought let Karl swallow a mouth of saliva, could he convince the prince that the witches were not evil? There were rumors of his Royal Highness unique ideas, he should have a character different from ordinary people, but also that he hated the church very much. Maybe he could do it! He thought, although in the end the hanging of Anna was ordered by Prince Roland, but everyone could see he was not willing to do it.

The prince himself was still in his early twenties, this should make it easier to understand, those girls were still in the marriageable age, how will they suddenly become evil and do unforgivable acts?

Of course, there was a possibility that Karl would end as a Witch Helper, he would have to go to the gallows, together with the witch. The Church's law stipulates that anyone who shield a witch or who would plea for leniency, should be regarded as someone who abandoned himself and become a demon disciple.

Only the prince, the prince who hated the church, could be his last hope, since only he could declare the church's law as a waste of paper.

Karl prayed in his heart.

Even though he did not know to which God he should pray, he closed his eyes and prayed for a blessing.

In memorial of the dead Anna, for the sake of Nana who was still alive, and for himself, so that his own heart crack would no longer expand.

He decided to take the risk.

Chapter 11 - Third Princess

“The sea breeze has become so cold.”

While gazing at the boundless ocean surface, Garcia Wimbledon said while stroking out her wind tangled hair with a feeling of regret in her voice.

“Because the winter is coming,” she said, looking back at the handsome man standing behind her and giving him a reply. “Although this is the south, it is not the deep south. There, people don’t understand what winter means.”

“During the winter our fleet cannot be in the port, the ocean current will hold them down, we will be unable to move a single step. So at this time, they should be at the last voyage.” The woman turned around, “Ryan, how much time has passed since the Blacksail Fleet has set sail?”

“Two months and four days,” the man answered without hesitation, “if nothing else happens, within three days they will arrive at the Port of Clear Water.”

She laughed, “I hope they can give me a sufficient surprise.”

Ryan looked at the woman in front of him, his heart was filled with emotion. When reflected by the autumn sun, her gray hair had traces of silver in it, her long and narrow eyes were a reseda green. While looking at her, you would feel an indescribable sense of oppression. Due to staying at the coast for a long time, her skin

had gotten slightly rough, it was not longer as white as all the other women of the royal family were, but Ryan did not complain. In his eyes, Garcia had the temperament that cast any other beauty into the shade.

Compared with those inbred idiots from the Graycastle flock she appeared to be different, rather the daughter of King Wimbledon III was a true genius. She possessed the wisdom and pride of a noblewoman, however unlike the other nobility, who would scrupulously abide by common sense, on that point, she was even a bit like the civilians – breaking away from the ordinary, filled with expectations, with an extremely rich spirit for adventure.

Of course, no civilian would have this kind of ability and vision, to join the rank of a duke right away, compared to her, even the other aristocracy appeared to be lacking in foresight.

All of the trade income of the Port of Clear Water was to be reinvested into the fleet construction, no coin was to be left in their treasury, the light of a miser would not shine very far.

‘Hiding a gold royal in the cupboard would be without any meaning, when you don’t use it, it will be like a stone. Only when you take it out, can it reflect its own value. The point is, to spend it wasn’t equal to losing it, as long as the investment is on the spot, the reward you gain, will go far beyond your own investment.’

This auspicious method, Ryan could still deeply remember her telling it to him, it was almost like she was anointing his head with the purest balm, it easily broke through all the inherited concept of his former teachings.

Compared to those nobles who spent their whole day saving and trying to increasing the amount of their gold royals, Ryan had the feeling that this was the true method of a ruler.

So he has boldly placed his life under Garcia's command, vowing to follow her to the Port of Clear Water.

After they had arrived here, Ryan had found out, that the third princess was far more than her philosophy — not only was she a person of philosophy, furthermore she was also a person of action. At the center of her plan was her Blacksail Fleet, and on the path to her ambitions, there was no hindrance that was allowed. Already five years had gone by, Garcia's forces have infiltrated the Port of Clear Water, organized and prepared her Blacksail Fleet – and then, her father, Wimbledon III started the strive for the position of the King. In other words, even from the beginning, she had already walked in front of all the other heirs.

“Let's go back inside the room, the wind is becoming more and more powerful,” Garcia said. Her palace was located at the Blue water Port, above the natural harbor. The tower-like building seemed to be a protector stationed above the shore. On the top of the tower was a circular terrace, with an unobstructed field of view, it was possible to have a bird's-eye view from the entire harbor, seeing the coming and going of the merchant ships.

Today, after her five-year operation, the business plan in the Port of Clear Water had already begun to take shape, every six months a barque would be launched. Furthermore, she had already obtained the people's trust. While the third princess seemed to be in good

mood, Ryan hesitantly raised his biggest doubt, which has haunted him for months.

“Your Highness, there is one thing I do not understand...” he said as he shut the door, leaving the roar of the sea breeze outside.

“You may speak,” she nodded while smiling.

“How could you have foreseen all of this, even before the king has announced the King’s order?” He had also thought that it would be impossible that her father Wimbledon III would mentioned it to her in advance, but even after having carefully thought this matter over he still hadn’t come to a conclusion. Everyone knew, that the second prince was the heir that the king valued the most, the King’s Order had been set up for him. This point could be seen by everyone, since the second Prince had gotten Valencia as fiefdom.

Could she have guessed all of this on her own, furthermore already having started five years ago laying out her plan? God, she was only eighteen years old!

“Foreseen?” She showed a funny look, “do you take me for a witch? I don’t have that kind of ability.”

“Erm, but.....”

“Furthermore I did not know that my father would declare the strive for the King Order, paving the way for his treasured second

son. In fact, there exists no connection between the strive for the King Order and my plan”

There was no relationship? When Ryan suddenly become aware of this aspect, his mouth became wider and wider.

Seeing the expression of disbelief on Ryan’s face, Garcia smiled. “Don’t tell me I should have waited for my father, to first tell me that I should fight for the throne, would I have then have had the ability to fight for the throne? Similarly, would it really in the end have been the one who govern his town the best be the one to sit on the throne of Graycastle? I thought you understood my plan when you had seen the Blacksail Fleet.”

So that’s the reason, Ryan murmured, her fleet is not only for the battle of the throne. This fleet belonging to the third princes could change the sails after leaving the port, robbing the ships from other cities and countries. Similarly, the third princes encouraged the people to go out to the sea, to participate in her Blacksail Fleet. She promised, all the loot would become the property of the ship’s captain, the Port of Clear Water would never collect any tax toward this profit.

This move would bring her huge wealth, so this time she had simply ordered the Blacksail Fleet to sail straight south, to plunder any ship which passed the endless Cape, as well as the people of the southern Shamin.

And these measures were not just for money. She did not take the plundered wealth to build cities or expand the land trade, she just invested it back into the yard and continued to build more ships.

In the past few years, she had gained a large number of experienced sailors and fierce warriors, and also embraced the people's hearts and minds — if she couldn't continue to govern, all those who had participated in the plundering of the ships and villages would also be sent to the gallows.

“The best in governance of his territory would end on the Throne of Graycastle?” No, Ryan now knew, to be able to sit on the throne, she would need to possess numerous warships and soldiers, then she could follow the Sanwan River, even reaching out to pressure the City of Golden Harvest.

“You knew that you would be assigned to the Port of Clear Water?”

“This, contrary to what one might think was unexpected, a deal to increase the business value of this place,” Garcia shrugged, “originally it was a pay back to the church who tried to fool me...”

Related to the church? Seeing his counterpart haven't said anything more, Ryan also did not dare to question further. But he knew, even if Garcia had not come to Port of Clear Water, this place would still have followed her will, and moved according to her desired direction.

“Putting those matters aside,” she poured herself a cup of black tea. “The little trick from before seems to have failed.”

“Ah, yes,” Ryan who hurriedly recovered his thoughts, replied,

“There is only news coming from Border Town, they reported that the pills have failed. There is no news from the other places.”

“No news should mean they were killed by my brothers, nothing to be surprised about. Originally they were chess pieces who had been easily arranged, only to be used in the meanwhile. However...” She changed the subject, “for other pieces to fail is normal, but I would not think even my fourth brother would still be safe and sound. To tell the truth, I’m a little disappointed.”

“Kingfisher said in the secret message, that the prince certainly ate it, but...”

“A failure is still a failure, I don’t want to hear any excuses,” Garcia interrupted, “soon it will be the time of the Months of the Demons. Our lovely brother will have to go searching for refuge in Longsong stronghold, right? When the moment arrives that the demon beasts invade, I am afraid that he will need to stay for a long while inside of the stronghold. Write to her, tell her to take hold of this opportunity. I would like to see, whether the goddess of fortune will stay by the side of fourth brother once again.”

“Yes, your highness.”

“You go ahead,” Garcia waved her hand, when Ryan was about to leave, the princess called to him once more. “Ah, yes. I seem to recall that the pill had been bought from an alchemist master, wasn’t it?”

Ryan nodded.

“What did he say back then? The pill will be colorless, tasteless, and will melt inside water, if it enters the mouth it will be incurable, a guaranteed death, it was his latest alchemical achievements, right?”

Garcia yawned, “hang him.”

Chapter 12 - Firing

Roland stood by the kiln in the backyard, waiting for the first batch of cement to be released.

The brick house that he had designed for the cement production was fifteen meters long and four meters wide. The front and back each had a door, the front door was as spacious as possible, it was so that people could easily transport materials into the house. Instead the back door was only one person wide, the only use was to let Anna secretly into the firing room.

Therefore, he also built a wall which was halfway around the house, the import and export arrangements were guarded by knights — they were Carter's men, their loyalty was beyond doubt.

The cement production process was very simple. First the limestone would be grinded into powder, afterwards it was mixed with clay, iron powder, and then it would be calcined with either a dry or wet method. It could then be used after the final grinding together with the plaster. The raw materials were very common, only the iron could be difficult to obtain and hold in a large number, the critical fact lied in the process of reaching the right calcine temperature.

Roland did not remember the specific temperature needed to produce cement, even if he did remember it, he did not have the possibility of measuring and controlling the temperature — whether it was with an infrared thermometer or a thermocouple temperature-measurement gun, both tools were unavailable, this made the production of the cement countless times more complex.

He only knew that the temperature was almost similar to the melting point of iron, and that the calcination process was also a difficulty in the production of cement.

In the era of less advanced smelting technology, maintaining the temperature of the furnace has been a problem for all people. The heat loss of an ordinary open furnace was too great; it was difficult to maintain a temperature at 1200 degrees. But then he would also require a high temperature resistance furnace, he would also have to figure out how to make firebrick. The traditional iron making blast furnace would be heated up to the point of melting, the temperature may be up to the standard, but the narrow chamber was too small for cement calcination to take place, Roland was afraid that the time before the Months of Demons was not long enough for him to prepare all of this.

Therefore, Roland's design for the kiln did not have any heating measures, he relied purely on Anna's capabilities.

The broken-down particles of limestone and clay were all mixed together with water into a slurry, this was then evenly spread within the kiln. The knights then locked the door and walked away. Afterwards Anna would enter from the back door, use her fire to bake the earthen slurry until it melted into the iron powder.

Roland was somewhat restless; this was his first step towards upgrading Border Town. If he couldn't produce cement, building a wall in three months would be just empty talk. Without the wall, there would be no people who would be willing to stay in this place. Whether it was in real life or within fictional literature, if you wanted to progress, a stable base was always essential.

“Your Highness, can this kind of product really hold the stones together?” Carter, standing at the side of the fourth prince asked. Although the prince had told him that this was the latest results from the research of the alchemists of Graycastle, he was still skeptical. After all, those people really haven’t made any useful products so far.

“Who knows? Anyway, that’s what they said it would,” Roland spread out his hands in resignation.

The world of alchemy and astrology were known as the sage arts. In the mainland, these professions were all very popular. In general, the royal family would develop their own alchemist and astrologers, meant for refining and predicting fate. For ordinary people, these studies were too classy. In light of this, Roland would naturally make the source of cement formulas out to be from the alchemists in the capital. As for whether the chief knight believed him or not, it didn’t matter.

Through the window they could see the flame gradually stop burning, it seemed that the calcination was complete.

When Roland stood up and went to take a look, Carter had been driven away from the gardens, so he was waiting alone by the front of the backdoor for the brick.

The gates creaked open and Anna walked out. The First thing Roland did was to drape a robe over her body, then brought a cup of water for her, “How are you?”

The face of the witch was full of dust, due the wet processing system and the amount of dust was also low, but the hot air needed for the calcination still produced quite some dust. She was not wearing a mask, staying inside for more than 10 minutes was obviously not too comfortable. She coughed and nodded, “The slurry has already changed into powder.”

Roland waited until the temperature in the kiln cooled down enough, although he needed to wrap a wet towel around his head, he still grabbed the shovel and stepped into the back door.

He was instantly surrounded by the hot air, for some time he felt that it was difficult to breath, the skin on his hands was roasted immediately. Fortunately, taking a shovel of powder did not take too much time, otherwise if he stayed for a few minutes longer in that environment he would fall into shock from the high temperature.

“Is this what you wanted?” asked Anna, who was now wearing her witch outfit.

“It looks very much like it,” Roland spread out the fine powder flat on the ground, using his finger to sense the temperature, “to know if it is definite we will need to test it first.”

“What’s the use of it?”

“It is for building houses, or repairing bridges and the roads, it can be used in many other places too. If it is successful, afterwards

the people will be unafraid of the wind, or that their homes would be unaffected, by the cold, rain or snow.” With his other hand, he patted the girl’s head, “This was only possible thanks to your ability.”

Anna lowered her head, Roland did not know if it was or wasn’t an illusion, but he felt that the girl’s breathing became faster after he patted her.

According to the theory, it was important to fire the grinded materials together with the gypsum. With this, it would be possible to adjust the hardening time. But now it would be needless to think about it too much, after a short break Roland took the shovel again and grabbed some more cement. He then called Carter who was standing outside the courtyard over, letting him prepare three different mixtures of the powder with the sand to compound cement mortar.

The chief knight completely didn’t mind this manual work, to him, doing this kind of work was many times better than the substitute fights he had for his Highness, every time he got into a brawl with the other young lords while he was on an outing with young ladies (prostitutes) in Graycastle.

Because it was already inside, iron powder was not added to the raw material, the color and luster that came out of it was lighter than normal, appearing to be an ashen gray. Roland spread the grout over a brick, and he then put down another brick on top of it. The cement solidification process would take around four hours, but taking into account the instability caused by the production of the cement, he intended to simply wait until

tomorrow before seeing the results.

The second day early in the morning, Roland, Carter and Anna all hurriedly rushed to the firing place in the backyard. When he opened the door, he saw that the cement had the appearance of solidification condition, the two pieces of brick were tightly bound together. The consolidation appeared to be uneven, and on some places, it appeared frosted over.

Roland crouched down, scraping off the aroused frost, and trying to press his finger into the hardened cement, the touch made his heart feel pleased, the cement surface was solid, completely different from the touch of rammed earth, namely, using his nail to scrape against it didn't leave any traces.

Carter repeated the action of the fourth prince, attempting to move the rock, but he also did not succeed. He even resolutely kicked against the side of it with his foot, until the connection between the cement and earth broke, but the two pieces of bricks were still firmly bonded together. At last, he swung the hilt of his sword against the brick, but only a small piece at a corner broke away.

“This is the effect of ‘cement’,” Carter immediately realized its purpose, “This is incredible. Yesterday it could flow like a melted candle, just one night later, it's like a rock. With this kind of material, building the city wall will go much faster. As long as we have enough stone, we could even build a wall around the border within five years!”

“What's the use of that?” Roland did not accept the suggestion,

“A tall wall would be unable to stop any enemy coming at us from the inside. I would rather turn the old wooden homes of Border Town into solid concrete rooms, so that my people no longer need to worry about a natural disaster turning them homeless.

“.....” the Chief Knight was speechless; he really did not expect the fourth prince with all his kinds of bad habits to say this.

“In the future, you will see,” Roland reaffirmed himself one more time about the importance of the road he would walk on – with regard to the numerous battles he had to fight in the future, science and technology were his best allies. And knowing this, the help of the witches was the first step on the path he had to walk.

Chapter 13 - City Wall

Soon the cement production got on the right track, in order to permit Anna a sufficient amount of rest, the kiln was only used two to three times per day. To obtain the most out of each calcining process, they had to gather more raw materials. For this, Roland once again issued orders to recruit more workers, until their current numbers were doubled.

But he also knew that he could not only rely on Anna to do all the firing. People who were working long-term in a dusty environment, would eventually become sick; furthermore, once the scale of future production increased, Anna alone would not be enough to satisfy the demand.

The witches should not be used as consumables. Instead, they should serve as an engine to promote the development of civilization. Although Roland was already aware of this fact, at the moment, he could only invest all of his energy and manpower in building the city wall. After all, If they couldn't stop the demon beasts, everything else would soon become unimportant.

Digging out the foundation for laying the City wall had already started in order to connect the northern slope with the Chishui River To increase the production speed, he himself personally took charge of the overall project. He dug out the first shovel of earth with his own two hands in front of the shocked masses of surrounding onlookers.

Roland thought after the problem with the cement was solved, that building the city wall would be easy and relaxing. But he soon

found out that his prior experience in engineering wasn't enough to understand a single word from the project. How deep and wide did the foundation have to be? How to resolve the different heights of the sections? How to ensure that the more than six hundred yards long wall would be built in a straight line? He had previously seen the construction of a road by a group of young men. They were looking at a scale on their measure instruments; it was called a theodolite and level, right? But both of those tools didn't exist here!

As an unfortunate mechanical engineer, although Roland and the civil engineer next door were both called the two engineering dogs, the content they had actually learned was poles apart. Of the mud artisans that he'd hired, no one had ever been involved in the construction of any major projects, it could even be said that his own understanding was better than theirs. Therefore, building the wall started very slowly, it took an entire week to dig out just half of the foundation that they needed.

Once a project got out of control, it would be difficult to say how the final product would look like. For example, this dug out foundation which was hard to dig, came out as a shallow groove, rather than the foundation of the wall. It was more suited to be called a drainage ditch. Despite Roland's descriptions, the width that they dug out was more or less different for each person. Thus, the width clearly became out of shape, becoming more and more narrow as it went. While standing at a distance, the foundation practically resembled a curving and twisting snake.

Even so, Roland was unwilling to stop the project. With little else than the digging on his mind, as long as it was not the time of the firing, which was Anna's job, he would stay at the northern slope

for the rest of the day. Adjusting the direction of the pit's extension with the naked eye, slowly moving it forward. Simultaneously he also doubled the reward for enlisting stone craftsmen.

Fortunately, this predicament did not last long, when Roland was preparing the sixth cement calcining; Barov the Assistant Minister reported that a stonemason had responded to the recruitment. It was said that he was a former member of the mason guild. The people who were waiting for an audience had already been made to wait outside the hall.

When he got this information, he nearly burst for joy, in his memories, the Graycastle mason guild was a famous organization, even the fourth prince had heard of their name. But in the end, because of a construction error, they had been ordered to disband.

But how can we finish this without help from stonemasons?

“Bring him in,” Roland put on a calm expression and nodded. He originally wanted to tell Anna that she should also leave, but he then thought it wouldn't be a problem. Border Town had more than two thousand people in it, very few had seen the true face of the witch. Moreover, her look now, in a bizarre new dress, and her appearance before, of her wholeheartedly courting death, when she was not her usual self, was worlds apart. He estimated that even if she was seen, she wouldn't be recognized.

Karl van Bart felt restless when he was lead into the courtyard by the knight; he intended to inform his Highness, that this time of year was unsuitable to carry out such a large-scale project. After

acquiring his Highness' trust, he could slowly change the prince's view on witches. In the rumours, his Highness always acted wildly, what should he do when it seemed he would go the contrary result of his advice?

With his thoughts moving in a whirl as he bowed down, when he lifted up his head again, he suddenly stopped and stared blankly – the girl at the side of his Highness looked so familiar to him, so familiar that he felt like he was dreaming. Karl rubbed his eyes, then looked once again, he could not help but cry out, "... Anna!"

Roland's heart stopped for a beat. How was it possible? He just wanted to hire a craftsman, but who could have known that the craftsman was also the witch's neighbour? He could tell, that the other was absolutely familiar with Anna, if not, it would have been impossible to recognize her immediately. He looked at Carter. The chief knight got the hint, he immediately pulled the latch, blocking the only exit.

"Venerable... Teacher?"

Anna's reaction let Roland's spirit, circle for a while before he came back to complete consciousness, what, teacher?

"It's really you, Anna, I... I..." Karl only felt his eye socket warming up, and then something started flowing from it. He knelt powerlessly on the ground, constantly repeating, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry... very good, too... well..."

After Karl van Bart was able to calm his mood, he slowly stood up

and then bent over once more to pay tribute to Roland again, “I’m very sorry, your Highness, I forgot my manners.”

“This, in the end what is going on? Aren’t you a mason?”

“I used to be,” when Karl had regained a calm mood, his speech became very fluent. His Highness had not killed Anna! The one who was hanged on the execution ground was substitute – being aware of this point, he already knew how he had to progress further. Although it was unclear why the other party rescued a witch; but regardless, even if his Highness wanted to take her as his concubine even that would be much better than being crucified. This showed that the prince wasn’t afraid that the witches were the evil incarnation as described in the rumours.

He described his experiences of living in this Border Town, since the time he fled out of Graycastle. Including the fact that he had opened a college here, and that he had found out that Nana Paien, one of his students, had also become a witch. Finally, he pleaded with his Royal Highness, that he would also take Nana into his palace, so that she would be safe from exposure.

Anna, who stood to the side had a caring expression on her face, while listening to the plea for Nana, but from the beginning to the end she never said a word.

Yet another new witch! This truly was important news, and good news too, but he seemed to remember the name Paien. When Roland quietly asked the assistant minister, he found out that it was in fact, the small aristocratic family of Border Town.

“You can take her to see me, if she is a witch, I will make sure, that she doesn’t get hurt,” Roland promised, “But I cannot take her away from the Payne family, especially when she had not suffered any threat from her maternal family. Also, me rescuing Anna is not what you think ...”

He considered it and thought that telling the truth would be better, “I need her help. The idea that they are the Devil’s force is absolutely nonsense. I believe that the power of a witch, regardless of whether it is good or evil, can be controlled. So Anna, Nana or any other witch, as long as they do not break any other laws, I won’t condemn them to death. “

“Next, we will turn to the town business, did you participated in the construction of the Graycastle city walls?” The prince quickly changed the topic back to the construction matters.

“Yes!” Karl nodded. Although, his Highness the fourth prince did not resemble his prior knowledge of the prince; he did not expect that the prince would need a witches’ assistance, however, his wish to protect Nana was accepted, that was enough.

“Well, I’m going to build a wall from the Chishui River to the foot of the northern slope. The goal is to ward off the demon beast invasion. From now on this project is your responsibility.”

Chapter 14 - Ability

“Your Highness, how tall and wide should the city wall that you’re planning to build be?”

“It should be at least fifteen feet high, six feet wide, allowing for four men to advance side by side on top of it,” Roland had to nod inwardly, professionals truly weren’t the same as ordinary people. They would first ask about the technical parameters and then determine the construction program.

“So it will require for us to dig a trench one man deep to stabilize the upper part of the wall, in addition, for a six foot wide top of a fifteen foot high wall, the width at the base will need to be at least doubled.” Karl replied quickly, “Thus just digging the trench also will consume a lot of manpower. Your Highness, if you give me a hundred and fifty workers, I should be able to dig the trench the months prior to the demons’ arrival .”

“A trench cannot stop the evil beasts,” Roland answered noncommittally.

“That’s true, but if we build the upper section of the city wall with stone masonry, it will take three years time. In order to only stop the evil beasts, you needn’t build the wall so high, approximately 12 feet high should be enough. The width can also be reduced by a third, resulting in a six-foot wide foundation. With simultaneous digging of the trenches and the building of the wall, as well as an increase of the workers to two hundred... In that way, I should be able to finish it by January, in the next year, before the arrival of the demons.”

Karl paused, then said, “Please forgive me, Your Highness, this really isn’t a good time to start. In case the construction of the wall is not on time, even if the trenches were dug well, they will still lose their original form after the soaking rain and snow throughout the winter. When you return, instead of finishing it, you would only need to spend more time and manpower to clean up the softening trench, excavating and deepening it one more time. “

“Say, in case we only build the wall twelve feet high and four feet wide, how long would you need to dig the trenches?”

“It should be finished within one and a half months,” Karl replied.

“Then do it according to this plan, trenching and masoning at the same time, so that we succeed a month prior to the arrival of the demonic beasts.” Roland waved his hand, interrupting Karl, “I know what concerns you, but take a look at this, this is the latest work from the Graycastle alchemical workshop.”

Naturally, he had no time to allow the stonemason to see the gluing process. Instead, he showed him the two bricks he had glued together earlier. Fortunately, when the prince spoke, almost no one dared to question him. When Karl heard that this alchemical adhesive cement could turn from a liquid into a solid form overnight, furthermore that it came with a sky-high adhesion effect, his face exposed his incredible shock. As a stonemason who had dedicated half of his lifetime into his work, he could naturally recognize how great this invention has gone. Apart from stone

binding, the most important fact was that it was possible to freely shape its figure! Wouldn't that be equivalent to no longer needing a second cutting and polishing process, being suitable for any loosely shaped stone? The time-consuming processing stage could be abandoned altogether and the construction rate of any building could be raised to a whole new level. This alone was exciting enough!

Roland looked at the expression on Karl's face with satisfaction, and once again asked, "What do you think, will three months be enough?"

Karl van Bart's voice somewhat shivered, "If you're right, no, no, I mean... If the alchemical workshop described this matter correctly, I... I'm willing to try."

"Very good, I will let people summarize the detailed information of cement for you. If there are still anything else you need to discuss with me, then feel free to talk with my assistant minister," Roland laughed, "Mr. Karl, from now on you will be the chief of the employees' office. "

On the next day Roland saw Nana in the afternoon. The little girl stared blankly at Anna, clutching her clothes for a long time, before saying, "I'm already... Dead?"

The first time Roland saw her, he had to admit that the power of the witch did not only give them the ability to use magic. To some extent, it also changed their appearance and temperament. She and Anna were very different types, but both of them had a unique charm. This feeling had nothing to do with age, and it was also

unrelated to their situation. Even when Anna was in jail, waiting for her death sentence, the radiance she emitted still continued unabated. He searched through his entire memory, whether it was a noble lady with a very good upbringing or a street walker in Graycastle, neither had given off such an aura. If one insisted on describing it, then compared with other woman, it was as if the witches were the colors in a black and white photograph.

She was brought over by Karl van Bart, who afterward retired tactfully, leaving only Roland, Anna, and Nana in the backyard. “You’re not dead, Anna too is alive and well,” Roland had to hold back a smile, “I’m the fourth Prince Roland Wimbledon, and you’re -.”

“I’m Nana Payen,” when the little girl heard that she herself did not die, her expression turned lively again. She ran straight to Anna’s side, beginning to chatter with her, unconcerned, disregarding the identity of Prince Roland Wimbledon. Roland naturally didn’t care what a 14 – 15-year-old girl had to say. Instead, he leaned on the round table and poured himself some ale, appreciating the ‘day-to-day behavior’ from the side.”

Anna was clearly a little bit calmer now. In the time Nana would take to say more than ten sentences, Anna would say only one. Having said that, while Anna was only seventeen, she already exuded a big sister kind of feeling. Roland couldn’t help but think, “When she grows up, how outstanding will she become?”

When Nana’s speaking slowed down, he coughed, and opened his mouth, then asked, “Miss Paien, I heard from your teacher that you have awakened as a witch?”

Compared to the vast majority of people who used the word “Fallen” when becoming a witch, Roland preferred the term “awaken”. He was not naïve enough to think that all witches were immaculately white, people who already had a malevolent personality would only bring about greater destruction. This was the same with weapons, they could produce violence, but they could also be used to resist violence. The crucial point in it was in the person who was holding the weapon.

Perhaps the church’s propaganda of the massacres caused by witches was based on the facts, but using that as proof that the whole witch community was guilty was the greatest of injustices.

Nana’s face once again stiffened, she whispered, “Will you hang me?”

“No, of course not, the gallows are for heinous criminals. You are not one of those and Miss Anna is not one either, so do not worry about that.”

She took a breath and nodded, “I’m not sure... The teacher said witches were coerced by the devil and afterward gained some kind of evil powers. C-could I be possessed? Moreover, I have never seen the devil.”

“When did you find out that you, yourself, have become different?”

“Roughly a week ago,” Nana muttered, “I saw a bird with a

broken leg and wanted to help it. And suddenly, I felt something flowing out of my hands.”

“There were things flowing out?” Roland asked, “What happened then?”

“Ah... It suddenly enclosed the bird like a sticky bubble of water,” Nana’s head tilted when recalling this, “Then the bird’s leg was healed.”

Does she have the power of healing? Roland’s heart began to race, he was very clear what this ability would mean. With the absence of antibiotics, there was no modern medicine here, people with traumas or infection would likely encounter death in these ages . As such, rapid wound healing was almost the equivalence of saving many lives. This ability was very limited in promoting the progress of civilization as a whole, but it had an amazing significance to every individual’s life.

He immediately went to the door, looking for a knight to bring a living chicken. If it could be proven that what she had said was true, he might be able to use this as a source to change the Border Town’s view on witches, ending the current situation of their ruthless persecution.

Chapter 15 - Flattering Oneself

Seeing the knight accept his order and leave, Roland returned to the table, “You can heal small animals, so why would you think witches are evil?”

“The teacher said, witches can do what ordinary people cannot do, and sometimes it may not look bad, but that would be only a trap, set up by the devil to tempt more people... “The girl trailed off. “I really have not seen the devil, I swear.”

“Of course you haven’t seen him, that’s merely the church’s lie, your teacher was also deceived by them,” Roland soothed.

“The Church lies?” Nana’s jaw dropped down, “Why?”

Roland shook his head, giving no explanation. Even if he explained it, they wouldn’t understand it. Before a civilization develops to a certain extent, these kind of outlandish things always happened. Even when no one benefited from it, people would automatically contribute natural disasters, man-made disasters, or incomprehensible phenomena as a product controlled by someone behind the curtains – from historical point of view, this was a boulder which in majority women had to carry on their back.

And in this world, witches who owned a feasible power of unknown origin became an easy target for the church. Thinking about it, it was absolutely impossible for the church to ignore this kind of extraordinary appearances, no matter what. They would have to confer all witches as Saints, naming their powers as the gift

of God; or kill all of the witches, stating they were the devil's spokesperson. However, once you choose the former, the majesty of monotheism would receive a heavy blow – as soon as a witch not belonging to the church emerges. In the case of all religions believing in other gods labeling the witches as Saints, they would all be people chosen by God, and so whose god would be the only true god?

Polytheism could only exist on the premise that all gods truly exist, capable of restricting each other. Since God was nonexistent, this was all symbolic crap that someone had created by running off their mouth, so why permit the opposite side to exist and share this world with them? So anyone would claim their god as the true god and believe in monotheism. And when it come to a member of another religion, there was only one way to go – liquidation. In the end, they could only choose the latter option, to spare no effort in killing all the witches.

There was absolutely no relation to the devil; it was only for their own benefits.

A living chicken was prepared by the castle kitchen right away, and then the knight carried it by the wings, while it still fluttered and kicked in confusion.

The next thing made Nana dumbfounded; Roland took the silver knife from his waist and had the knight grab it so that he could stab the chicken's body. When the chicken was wounded, Roland allowed Nana to come up and treat it, after curing it another stab followed... this way they proceeded over and over again.

After half a day, when the chicken finally took its last breath, Roland had a general understanding of Nana's ability.

She could restore damaged parts, including cuts, tears, fractures and bruises. In case a part was missing, such as a cut off chicken leg, she could not make it grow new one. However, under full use of her ability the broken claw could be reconnected again, allowing the cut to be healed. Ultimately, she could not reverse death, once the chickens died, her treatment was ineffective.

During the entire course of treatment Roland did not see any trace of the "sticky water", instead, she simply put her hand on the chicken's wound, and the wounds would heal at a rate visible to the naked eye. After these series of tests, Nana's physical exertion was not large; she was at least not sweating like Anna after her training.

Only Nana herself was dissatisfied, she felt that the treatment of the chicken was unfair, to such an extent, that at the end of the experiment she widened her eyes and pouted at Roland.

"Well, don't just stare there, come and have something to eat," upon seeing her, Roland without any better option had to summon the "afternoon tea" to shift her attention. This move was already tested against Anna; he thought that very few girls of their age could resist the temptation of delicious desserts. As it turned out, Nana's performance in front of the pastries was not much better than the former's.

After eating the cake, Roland allowed Nana to leave.

Anna asked, “Why did you allow her to leave? Just like me, she’s also a witch, right?”

“She still has her family, and at the present time her family has not found out, that she has become a witch.”

Anna whispered, “It’s just a matter of time.”

“Right, sooner or later,” Roland sighed, “so, it’s a little late, but... Do you want to see your father?”

She shook her head; no wavering was seen in her lake-like eyes. It seemed that the betrayal of her father had made her completely lose her hope. She didn’t have a family to return to before, at least now she had a friend.

“Nana will always come back, in fact, I’m going to have her come here every second day to let her practice her own ability.”

Hearing this, she blinked her eyes and nodded quickly.

“Do you want to go back to Karl’s college and learn together with the other children?”

Anna did not answer, but he felt that he could understand her inner thoughts.

“These kinds of circumstance are unlikely to last long... As long as I am here, you will one day be able to live like normal people, anywhere you go there would be no one to arrest you, much less send you to the gallows. One day this will be reality, “said Roland stressing every single word ” I promise.”

Since Karl took over the city wall project, fourth prince Roland suddenly settled down.

He spent every afternoon in the castle garden, accompanied by Anna and Nana. Now they had no further need to prepare extra clothes for Anna’s training, even if there were leaping flames on each of her fingers, she could still operate them skillfully. Now it was unlikely to be like before when a mishap occurred, igniting her own witch’s uniform.

Nana also changed her clothes into the same witch uniform Anna wore, at first she felt a little reluctant about the practice, but the afternoon tea session appeased her. Seeing the two witches come and wander around in his backyard greatly alleviated the bitterness in Roland’s heart.

Occasionally, he went to the north slope at the foot of the mountain to check the progress on the city wall. After more than two weeks of construction, the wall had already reached a hundred yards in length. In this era where a theodolite to measure the distance didn’t exist, every day, at the same time, Karl would have the craftsmen determine the distance and evenness by using the shadows formed by the sun with the help of a wooden pole. They built a watchtower every ten columns to stabilize the city wall.

Such a large-scale building project was naturally also noticed by the town's nobility, but in addition to finding Barov and asking him about this project, they took no further actions as if this had nothing to do with them. Roland did not complain, since their possessions were at Stronghold Longsong, they would definitely not stay here and help him guard the Border Town. He could even imagine these people getting together and ridiculing Roland, saying he had overestimated his capabilities.

Not only had the nobility noticed the change, but the merchants as well. In the previous years, the traveling merchants would purchase animal fur, but now it appeared that there was no possibility to purchase it. One after the other, they began to set out and return to the stronghold. Naturally, the anger about their empty-handed return was vented to Roland. The news regarding the fourth prince Roland Wimbledon's building project to repel the demonic beasts in the Months of the Demons had already spread along the Chishui River, many calling it just stupid and ignorant.

At this point, no one thought that he could hold Border Town; even the majority of locals did not believe it. After all, the impression everyone got from the fourth prince did not include the courage to fight. Regardless what he did, in the end, he would take refuge in the stronghold.

In this manner, while everyone was discussing him, Roland welcomed his first winter after crossing over.

Chapter 16 - Future Route

The flames in the fireplace were in full bloom, dispersing the chill which penetrated through the doors and windows. Above the huge fireplace hung the skull of a deer with long horns. In the glow of the fire, the shadows reflections of the horns on the back wall appeared to be huge claws and teeth companions of skull.

Opposite of Roland stood a long deep-red wooden table laden with parchments and books. Most of the documents only needed his signature to the execute the order. Usually, Roland would only be here to handle official work, but since he had transformed the castle room into a three-room office he had grown to love working here.

Through the windows at the end of the floor he could see the town spreading out beneath his gaze, and in the horizon were the endless mountains. The mountains were almost impassable, they separated the Kingdom of Graycastle and the wild lands in two. The northern mountain slope was just a branching pass of the mountain range.

At the foot of the window he could see the wood-fenced garden, which Anna used to train. In order to provide a convenient place for afternoon tea, the brick pool was already transformed into a long table. If the weather was good he could go down and lie underneath the sun, or maybe even take a nap on top of the custom-made rocking chair.

Although it was small, it was nice to have your own personal garden as well. In his former life, if you wanted to sit on the stone

steps of a real castle, it would be almost impossible. Just to look around, you had to spend money to buy a ticket. But now, he not only had his own castle, but a whole town as well.

“Your Highness, recently we spent a considerable amount of money from your treasury to recruit tradesmen and handymen. If this continues, I’m afraid our treasury won’t last until next year’s spring.” Barov handed the parchment with the recent reports of the financial situation to Roland.

Originally, Border Town had a very simple chart of income and expenditure. Their line of income came from ore mining and trade with precious stones. This line of income was in the hands of the Longsong Stronghold. The output of the North Slope Mine was directly exchanged for wheat or bread, without any taxes, and the exchange of resources was presided over by the stronghold. Described in simpler terms, the North Slope Mine was a joint-stock item of the Longsong Stronghold nobility. Those nobles stationed in the border town could be seen as the custodians of the shareholders, their fiefs were mostly in the east of the stronghold. They came here only for a limited time, and there would be different people each year.

In fact, Border Town had less than 30 years of history. Compared with the nearly two hundred years of Longsong Stronghold, it was simply a newborn baby. Duke Ryan had only intended to establish an outpost here to get an early warning in case an evil beast invasion began. He had never expected that the pioneers who discovered a mine rich with mineral resources in the Northern Mountain Slope would just settle there, practically making a small municipality, named Border Town.

In order to prevent stealing, the Duke did not accept manpower sent by the other nobles. Instead, he employed the local residents. Even criminals became miners, and food was pro-rated based on the output of ore each home provided.

The stronghold would just provide some food and commissioned employers throughout the year. The stronghold only paid a fixed amount of money, it wasn't based on the mining output. Of the two thousand inhabitants of Border Town, more than half of them were in the mining services.

Another line was the town's other industries – the blacksmith's shop, tavern, textile shop and so on. From them, Border Town usually received a modest amount of revenue throughout the year, but it was quite difficult to have money left over by the end of it. The appointed Lord didn't govern Border Town seriously, since Roland was sent there from Graycastle. Instead, he had decided to stay in the stronghold, without returning to Border Town.

As a result, when Roland wanted to hire someone to repair the walls, he could only pay them from his own pocket. If it was the fourth prince from before, he would have certainly never done it. But the current Roland, as long as he gained a firm foothold in this Border Town, even if he had to spend all his property, it would still be worth it. Anyway, after the ore trade would no longer be settled with food, the town's income would still be no more than a drizzle.

The only question was if Longsong Stronghold was willing to give up their monopoly of trade with Border Town – this would be similar to entering a tiger's den to seize food, but the inventory data provided by Barov indicated that the mining efficiency was

low and the transportation of ore was inefficient and inconvenient. In fact, the value of the annual output of ore mining was more than 1000 gold royals, but for the entire stronghold that was only a drop of water in the bucket. The only ones benefiting from this were the partners of the investing aristocracy.

In consideration of the long-term development of Border Town, this line of income must be recovered. Roland's mind was clear on the fact that even if these people could fully recover their investment from the last ten years and longer, they would still not easily let it go. While mosquitoes were small, they were still meat. Besides, this was a seedling that could be useful to make money by reprehensible means. Previously, he was willing to give the investors certain benefits and compensation such as purchasing for half the price and such. However, the case of selling a full ship of ore for only half a ship of cereal, this kind of incident was not allowed to happen again.

While Roland was focused on pondering over the list of items, Barov was attentively watching him.

In these three months, or to be more exact, in the most recent month, some inexplicable changes had occurred to the fourth prince. Perhaps outsiders were still uncertain, but he was by the prince's side every day, so this kind of change could at most keep him for a short time in the dark.

During his time in Graycastle, Fourth Prince Roland Wimbledon was only known for his bad reputation. He would insist on his own way, behave unscrupulously, without any aristocratic demeanor... things like that. In short, no big mistakes were made, only

unceasing small ones. Compared to his two brothers, his position differed greatly.

When His Majesty sent him to Border Town, he was filled with disappointment. If His Majesty hadn't promised him the position of an official finance minister after the fight for the throne, he would have quit and walked away long ago.

Early on, in his first two months in Border Town, the fourth prince always showed an extremely childish behavior. He managed to offend the local nobility over and over again. Fortunately, the town itself was of a very small scale, so even if all administrative positions were vacated and he had to fill those positions with a dozen civilians, they would still be able to go on.

But from now on, it would become something different.

“When had the change occurred?” he thought, “It was probably it was after he saved the witch that the changes appeared.”

Barov didn't doubt that the devil had the power to enter a body, or that the prince could be manipulated by a hidden witch. But this was extremely unlikely, if the devil and witches had the capability to control someone, why would they choose the fourth prince? Wouldn't it be better to directly control His Majesty or the pope? Another point which dispelled his doubts was that he had witnessed the prince holding the 'God Punishment Lock'.

This was the Church's trump card to handle the witches. The power of any demon would collapse in front of the 'God

Punishment Lock', but Roland could hold it directly. In other words, in the case that he wasn't the fourth prince, when even God had no power about him, it was needless to fear the devil king, so was it necessary to expose him? To preserve one's own life was most important.

The Prince's style still continued in his own way, behaving unscrupulously, yet the feeling Barov got was that both styles were not at all the same. No, Barov thought, it should be the opposite. The biggest difference would be the purpose. He was aware of what Roland was planning to do, in order to achieve the goal, he had to employ some methods which were difficult to understand for ordinary people, like the time when he tried to persuade him to save the witch. Perhaps the planning was not very wise, but the prince really had planned in advance, and believed in the results firmly without any doubt.

This ability was the one that caused anyone to feel most puzzled. The title of king might be possible for any of Roland's brothers and sisters, but certainly not for the fourth prince himself. This thing was very clear, because how could he develop such a small place like Border Town? Even the gods couldn't do it! In the end, Roland came up with a crazy plan, the crazy plan to set up a defensive line outside of Border Town, so that they can develop better than the City of Golden Harvest. Was he really thoroughly convinced that this project would be successful?

If he was merely a madman, it would be bad enough. But for Roland, who vigorously built the city wall, that did not seem to be the case. He really planned to defend this place, merely with the help of the alchemical product 'cement', to build a wall, which is for the common sense, almost impossible.

Within Barov's family there was also an alchemist, but he had never heard of an alchemical workshop refining such a thing. The solution for the construction of the wall was based on something no one had seen before, in the end, was he only confident in himself, or was it just his reckless behavior?

“To what extent did Roland's plan go, and in the end how much do I know of Roland's scheme?”

Barov found himself interested in the approaching days.

Chapter 17 - Ambassador (Part 1)

“This is such a rotten place.” When stronghold emissary Petrov stepped out of his cabin, the smell of decayed wood hit him in the face. The surrounding air was damp and oppressive, causing people to feel entirely uncomfortable. He lifted his head up and inhaled through the nose. The sky was completely overcast, and it seemed that heavy rain was incoming.

“The last time you came here was a year ago,” said the assistant to the ambassador while he graciously put a wool coat on the ambassador’s shoulders, “There is nothing here, except stone.”

“It was a year and a half.” Petrov corrected. “Every season the Duke chose a different person to come around. The last time I was in Border Town, it was summer. But in addition to ore they have more, like a good variety of furs, and...”

“What?” His assistant had a blank look on his face.

Petrov shook his head and did not answer. He crossed over the side of the ship, stepping on the pier covered with moss, and a plank gave off a creaking sound from under his foot. The wood would probably continue to support the dock for a few years, but then it would break down, he thought. Border town not only had stone and fur, but even... land.

But speaking about this hadn’t any meaning, the assistant was only an unknown city hall officer, he was unable to see this point.

Between Longsong Stronghold and Border Town was a large area of wild land, which still needed to be cleared for cultivation. On one side was the impassable mountain range, while on the other side was the Chishui River, long and narrow like a corridor. As an outpost for the stronghold, if they assumed responsibility of the defensive line, it would also bring the wide expanse of land into the possession of the stronghold. The land had not been cultivated, so it didn't require any recuperation before plowing. Instead, many circles of crops could be planted, and on top of that, it had a natural line of defense on both sides. In the end, to produce enough for everyone to eat, it was not required to expend much effort. The food shortage in Border Town was just a way to relieve the stronghold of the problems caused by a growing population. In the future Border Town and the stronghold should become one territory, rather than the two separated territories they are now.

The only drawback was that it would need a three to five year-long operation, as well as large sums of money in advance.

Unfortunately, when talking about the foresight of investment, most of the nobility were bad businessmen.

“Hey, how can it be that the yard is empty?” The assistant pointed to a distant piece of land. “Shouldn't they have the ore ready?”

Petrov sighed softly, “We will go to the castle, and have an audience with His Royal Highness.”

“Wait... Mr. Ambassador, do you know if he will receive you?”

He didn't know if His Majesty would, but in his heart he didn't want to say it.

“Let's go, the stables are just in front.”

Trouble came now that the stronghold and Border town were divided into two separate territories. Because of the King's order to fight for the throne, the 4th prince was left in solitude. How would a normal aristocratic or royal member ever be here? Of course they would take all of this land for themselves.

Selling minerals and jewelry in exchange for food and bread? I am afraid that the prince's eyes only can see gold royals.

If it was himself, he would do it. To helplessly watch as one's own territory output is exchanged for only food... The ambassador was afraid that nobody would accept this situation. In addition, the products didn't have to go to the stronghold. Most of the nobility forgets the fact that the Chishui River didn't end at the Longsong Stronghold. He could sell the ore at market price in Willow Town, in Dragon Mountain, or even in Red City, then take people from their cities as new refugees – it was nothing more than a little further down the river.

What could the Longsong Stronghold do then? Block the river, and cut off the prince and his party? It would simply be a defiance of the royal family of Graycastle! Everyone knew that the 4th prince was least likely to become the king, but without a doubt, it would still not be good to defy him because he was still of the

king's blood. .

The Ambassador and his assistant rode on rented horses, coming slowly forward on the stone road along the river. The stables only had old horses of mixed colors; even if they rode slowly, the horses would still tremble. And for these two stupid horses, he had still to pay a deposit of two gold royals.

“You see, sir, is that a boat from Willow Town?”

Hearing his aide shout, he looked in the direction he pointed, only to see a ship with a willow leaf on their green banner, hanging on their single pole, slowly sailing down the river. The hull waterline was very high, indicating that it was loaded with cargo.

Petrov blankly nodded, but his heart sank, the prince moved faster than he had expected. If the prince had begun to contact those towns and cities downstream, the bargaining chips in his own hands lost value. He originally intended to acquire the ore for 30 percent lower than the normal price, so that he would still earn something. Not to mention, after the stones were turned into polished jewelry, the price of luxury goods were several times higher. Unfortunately, this was not a monopoly, nor was it only his family who had the final say. Participating in the mining project in Border Town were six noble families. If they lacked majority consent, then there would be no resolution.

However, they were slow in reacting, thinking that the situation was the same as before... Or, they thought the mining project was not worth that much attention. Anyway, the remaining five were indifferent, even his own father confidently rejected him. In fact,

they were wrong, the low reward of the mining output was mainly due to few other trading possibilities, if they transitioned to the normal trade, they could earn more. And if you earn more, you will be likely to produce more ore next year.

Could they achieve the monopoly scheme they thought out before? In all likelihood, no, it certainly couldn't be realized. Petrov thought, since he could see the empty yard, the prince did not intend to let these minerals be exchanged for poor quality wheat, he had to contact the other buyers.

If they still wanted to hold this line of business, a thirty percent discount was his best bargaining chip. Since the distance between Willow Town and Border Town was further, this would end in an increase of the transportation costs, but Willow Town had more than one source of ore; the first price they would offer would likely be lower than the market price by half. As for Dragon Mountain and Red Town, the price would be even lower, so the 4th prince would agree to Longsong Stronghold monopoly – especially for the gem trade.

But the problem was, if he signed a contract, would his father agree with it? The other five families believed that it would be a simple matter to let Border Town surrender, should he dismiss the interests of the family to get the contract?

After all, in their eyes, Border Town was still controlled by their own Longsong Stronghold, and everything could be given or taken away by them.

They slowly crossed the town, heading toward the castle located

in the southeast corner. It was not Petrov's first time here, but this time the owner had changed.

When the guards saw the ambassador, they immediately went in and informed the Lord.

4th prince Roland Wimbledon quickly summoned Petrov, and when the two were guided into the hall; the prince was already sitting at the main seat waiting.

“Mr. Ambassador, please sit down.”

Roland clapped his hands and let the maid bring hearty meals. Grilled whole chicken, a wild boar leg with mushroom stew, butter bread and a large bowl of vegetable soup. Obviously, in this borderland, the royal children hadn't the slightest impairment of personal enjoyment.

Petrov naturally didn't hesitate, he traveled by ship from Longsong Stronghold to Border Town, and even with favorable wind it took two days; if it was a multi-masted cargo ship, it would have been even slower, maybe three to five days. There was no kitchen on board, so it usually came with eating dried meat strips or wheat bread. Seeing the billowing hot dishes, he felt saliva surging in his throat.

But thanks to years of training in aristocratic culture, he could maintain perfect dining etiquette. On the contrary, His Highness' eating habits were a lot worse – in particular his use of the knife and fork. Petrov noted that in addition to the carving knife, the

4th prince used a pair of small sticks. When the slicing was completed, he used the sticks for all the other moves. And it looked like... two sticks were much more convenient than a fork.

“What do you think?” At the end of the meal, Roland suddenly questioned the ambassador.

“Uh, what?” For a moment the ambassador lost his spirit.

“This,” Roland shook the hands with the sticks, before answering Petrov, “The iron fork, for most people it is a luxury, not to mention a silver fork. When you are eating directly with your hand, it is very easy to put dirty things together with the normal food in the belly. Disease enters by the mouth, you know? “

The ambassador didn't know how to answer, he didn't understand the meaning of 'diseases enters by the mouth', but according to his understanding of the previous sentence, Roland was probably referring to the dirt stuck on food, and it would be easy to get sick when eating it. But when someone tried to diagnose the sickness, no one knew the reason why they died.

“How many sticks do you think you can get by cutting down one oak tree in the forest? These sticks are clean and easy to get. I'm going to promote this in the town.”

The prince sipped his wine and continued, “Of course, now my people don't get much meat to eat, but I will slowly change that.”

Petrov felt relieved, he now knew how to answer. Routinely, he expressed his support and blessing, but in his heart he did not agree. Let all the people have meat? That would simply be whimsical, even Graycastle could not do this, and this Border Town was in this desolate land.

Chapter 18 - Ambassador (Part 2)

The banquet went on.

There was a fairly harmonious atmosphere during the dinner. The 4th prince didn't talk about ore trade as he found it inconvenient to say anything.

When the prince told the maid to deliver the dessert, Petrov tentatively mentioned the trade.

“Your Highness, according to the previous procedure, today should be the day when you deliver the ore, but I don't see any ore in the terminal yard.”

Roland put down his small wood sticks and nodded, “Unfortunately, the northern slope mine collapsed a while back, this month my people can only try to resume production. However, the gravel from the collapse has not been cleared yet. According to the schedule, we will be able to start mining again at the beginning of next year.”

The mine collapsed? For a moment, Petrov was stunned, was that a coincidence? However, he quickly realized that the prince did not have the need to lie. Otherwise, if he himself went to the North Slope Mine, everything would be clear, so it was obvious that with a lie Roland would only beat his own face.

“Then... what happened to the ore from before the collapse?”

“That wasn’t much, the amount mined was according to the convention, my people were unable to mine more than the amount set by the convention..” Roland emphasized the words in a practiced manner, “Mr. Ambassador, you should also remember what happened during the Months of the Demons two years ago, right?”

Of course Petrov remembered it, the cold lasted for four months and in Border Town nearly one out of every two people starved to death. The cause of this was municipal Administrative Governor Reynold’s avaricious and insatiable greed. Between the aristocracy there was naturally internal opposition, some nobles even wanted to punish governor Reynold afterwards. But at the end of this incident nothing happened, only because he was the husband of the Duke’s second daughter.

Now when this was mentioned by the prince, Petrov got a bad feeling.

“This time it will be even worse,” Roland sighed, ” with what we could mine before, it was probably only enough for two months of food. I will try to support my people, but I’m afraid they won’t survive the winter, sir. The old ways of trade must be abolished!”

Petrov opened his mouth, but he didn’t know how to refute. He wasn’t a professional diplomat. In face of such a good reason, he really couldn’t point out any problems, so he could only delay the matter for the time being, “Your Highness, I have to express my regret. This time will not be a repeat of the tragedy before, I can afford to loan you a month of food, and when your people are able

to resume production next year, they can slowly repay the debt. “

“I already sold the ore to Willow Town, we can slowly repay you with their money.”

“But...”

“There is no ‘but’, however,” Roland immediately interrupted him, “they are willing to buy the ore with gold royals, and at the same time they sell wheat, cheese, bread, honey and more at market price... which we can buy with the royals we got from the former transaction. But, Mr. Ambassador, even if you are willing to lend us a month of food, would the other five factions agree with your decision? As far as I know, it isn’t even easy for Duke Ryan to reach an agreement with the other families.”

Petrov kept silent, the 4th prince had put it right. Not just the remaining five, he even feared his own father wouldn’t agree. If they wanted to maintain the monopoly, it would be necessary to modify the trading scheme, but he did not know how he could have the last word. He was called an ambassador, but in reality, he was just the spokesperson. Perhaps the Duke did not want someone to come to any private agreements with Border Town, right? Whether it was during the time of the former governor or now with the 4th prince, he assigned a different candidate every season, and these people were never the rulers of their families.

Regardless of the outcome, he had to try, so when he thought up to this point, Petrov spread out his last cards.

“Thirty.” he held up three fingers, “Longsong Stronghold will buy the ore and rough gems for less than thirty percent of the market price. I think this price should be higher than the price of Willow Town, Your Highness.”

Roland responded, “Indeed it is higher, but there is still the old question, can you guarantee the agreement of all 6 families?”

“I will immediately go back to Longsong Stronghold tomorrow. After I get an agreement, I will come back with a new contract.”

“But my people are unable to wait that long. You should know, that if you want to reach an agreement between the aristocracy, it is usually very time consuming.”

“Your Highness, the cooperation with Longsong Stronghold would be a better choice for you and your people. Willow Town is too far away, so you and your people can also escape to them during the Months of the Demons,” when speaking up to this point Petrov felt that his throat became dry, “but the road isn’t easy... it is quite dangerous.”

Good God, what the hell am I doing? Petrov’s heart pounded madly, did he really threaten the prince?

“Ha ha ha ha!” surprisingly, Roland did not fly into a rage, but instead laughed, “Mr. Ambassador, you seem to have mistaken something, I never thought of retreating to Willow Town.”

“What do you mean...”

“Of course, I didn’t intend to go to Longsong Stronghold either.”

Roland watched the ambassador’s expression with interest, “I’m not going anywhere.”

Petrov momentarily doubted whether his ears got it right or wrong.

Fortunately, the prince didn’t let this awkward silence continue for long, and he then explained, “This winter, I will always stay in Border Town. Border Town will become the new border of our kingdom. Do not be so surprised, my friend, I’m not spouting nonsense, I can show you the new masonry walls at the Northern Mountain Slope . “

“City... Wall?”

“Yes, connecting the North Slope Mountain and Chinshui River is a twelve foot high and four foot wide stone wall. With this, we can defeat the demonic beasts here at Border Town.”

Petrov felt his brain power wasn’t enough, when the former ambassador got back last season, he did not mention any city walls. No, at that time the lord of Border Town and the people were at Longsong Stronghold, how could they build the wall with the limited manpower they had? In other words, when the 4th prince arrived, he immediately began to build the city walls? Even so,

until now it had only been only three months, so how could they have built something in this short amount of time?

Also... What was it His Highness just said? Twelve feet high and four feet wide, connecting the North Slope Mountain and Redwater River? Petrov estimated this in his heart, building a wall of this size wasn't something possible to be done in less than 3 to 5 years, and first of all he did not even have enough stone masons for cutting and grinding so many stones! Even more, Border Town was only a mining town, most of the people living here were only common people.

When he hadn't even digested this news, Roland's next sentence also shocked him incomparably.

“As for the ore sales, starting next year, I will be willing to reduce the price by half, sir, but we will not only sell to Longsong Stronghold, because you don't really need that much ore. I think compared to the low profits of ore, you would prefer some more metal products, such as spades, shovels and the like.” Here again he paused, waiting until it seemed like Petrov understood the meaning of his words,” As for rough gems, we will sell them in the form of an auction, the businessman with the highest bid will be able to buy them. I would prefer to polish the stones myself, but unfortunately in the current Border Town there is no one with such an ability. “

But you're saying you have the ability to build the wall in this few months! Petrov's heart nearly burst from anger, and what does he mean, that Longsong Stronghold doesn't require so much ore? It's a mere output of one thousand gold royals, even if the production

would be increased, Longsong Stronghold could double it! Two thousand gold royals cannot be handled by Longsong Stronghold? That is a bit too arrogant!

He forced back the grievances of his heart, and tried to maintain a composed look, “Everything you said I have remembered, Your Highness. I will immediately go back and negotiate with the six families. But, the city walls you mentioned before... I first want to have a look. “

“Of course,” Roland smiled, “but do not be into too much of a rush, let us first enjoy and finish these kingly flavored pastries. After that, it wouldn’t be too late to start, right Mr. Ambassador?”

Chapter 19 - Lessons

After entering winter, the first rain finally fell. The rain had already lasted for two days without stopping.

Roland leaned over his desk and looked out of the window. The rain was blown upwards by the wind, hitting against the glass again and again, creating bursts of ripples. Under the refraction of the ripples, the image of the small town became distorted. The houses and the streets were bent in deformation, without any regular form. Due to the lack of any effective drainage measures, the stone roads were interlocked with streams of flowing water, from afar, it resembled many brooks of clear and crystalline water.

The distant mountains and forests were obscured by mist, and were faintly discernible, just like the border to the human world.

If such a landscape was placed into modern times, it would certainly be a tourist attraction, but what Roland wanted to see was a jungle made of concrete and steel. Because of the rain, the city wall construction also had to stop. This let his feeling of success, which he got on the day before yesterday when he “discouraged” the stronghold messenger, fade away.

“You just said that the air around us is made up of many different kinds of gases, is that true? “

Anna’s clear voice had interrupted Roland’s thoughts, and when he looked towards her, Anna blinked her beautiful blue eyes questionably.

“Ahem, Miss Anna, you should address His Highness with honorifics,” warned Carter from the side.

“Don’t be so particular about it,” Roland turned around, “she is now my student.” During the rain, he had called for Carter and the two witches to attend their own class – yes, he had decided to open a course of natural science. He was inspired by Stonemason Karl’s college. If even a mason can open a school, then could a mechanical engineer open one too? Why did discrimination exist? Wasn’t it because of ignorance? Universal education was at any age the most effective measure to promote the development of civilization.

He originally also wanted to call the assistant minister, but since he was busy with other government tasks, he declined. Roland didn’t know why, but since the beginning of winter Roland felt that Barov seemed to be filled with special enthusiasm, even almost supervising Border Town all alone.

When hearing of the possibility to learn new knowledge, Anna’s eyes immediately sparkled with interest. Nana, who didn’t need to treat wounded animals during the lessons, also became very happy. Carter, who was idle at the moment, attended the class to see what new nonsense the prince had thought of.

But not long after the class had begun, the knight’s eyes became lax. Nana’s look also became distant, staring only at the two words ‘Natural Science’ in a daze. Although it seemed that Anna could not completely understand it, she still tried hard to remember everything. Roland had to pause his lecture for a moment to let the

three people digest his teaching.

Hearing Anna's question, he smiled and nodded, "Of course, even though they look alike."

"Your Highness, I do not understand, since every gas looks the same, how can you know that there are different gases?" Carter expressed his doubts.

"I can even prove it to you."

Roland knew that even with these easy to understand words, most of the people would be confused by the theories.

He decided to use a simple experiment to arouse everyone's interest.

A candle, a glass, a basin, a bowl of limewater – these were the things he had prepared in advance. Although at this time they had only pale brown glass, far less transparent than the glass of his former time, it was still transparent enough to be used. After all, this simple test didn't need someone to observe the changing process.

Roland had done this test before once, the test results showed that although there was magic in this world, the rules of nature were still the same as on Earth. He asked Anna to light the candles, and then he put it in the basin.

“When something is burning, it needs to consume gas. This gas is also closely linked with every living organism, if we stop breathing, we will be like this candle. Watch.” Roland put the glass on the candle, and after the flame shook two times, it soon went out.

“It exhausts the air, sir, this is not surprising.” the chief knight spoke in a disapproving way, “Of course we will die without air. For example, if we fall into water.”

Nana also nodded.

“So, do you think that there in the glass is nothing at all?” Roland asked, then he poured the limewater into the basin, the limewater soon flooded into the glass, but it finally stopped when only half was filled.

This experiment was so classic that most elementary school teachers liked to use it as an experiment to increase the interest of the children in natural science. Roland could still remember the shock he felt when his own teacher had demonstrated it. From then on he embarked on the road of science and engineering, with no way to return.

He gently lifted a corner of the glass, and after a few moments bubbles of air could be seen rising out of the limewater.

Then, the clear limewater appeared to be a little bit cloudy, and a little white cloud slowly spread within the glass.

“If there was nothing in the glass, we wouldn’t have seen the changes in the limewater and the air bubbles. This shows that the air contains at least two different kinds of gases. In fact, burning a candle consumes only a part of the air, while the other part is unable to burn. Though it is colorless and odorless, like the former gas, its nature is the complete opposite.”

“Well... That seems to be the case,” Carter thought for a long time to figure out the relationship between the two, “but to know this, what is the use of it?”

“If you can get the former gas, you can let the flame burn longer, and when you obtain the other gas, you can quickly extinguish the flames!” Anna suddenly said.

She was simply a genius, Roland praised her in his heart. Even though there was a small fallacy, when hearing of the different properties of the gases, she could immediately think of several uses. This idea was definitely genius-level. Roland knew that she did not receive any modern education, but even without it, she could quickly think of this point, showing her extraordinary logic ability – at least she was far better than this chief knight.

“Right, it is possible to say that since humans learned to use fire, they were separated from the animals, even though obtaining fire was just a coincidence. Perhaps the lightning hit the trees and lit them, perhaps a rock hit another rock and released a spark. But if no one had noticed it, no one could have tried using it. We would still be the same as the animals. Roland guided them patiently and systematically in the direction he wanted, “The goal of this experiment was to show you that curiosity and thinking were the

driving forces of human progress. There are many of similar potential forces in nature, only waiting for us to discover and use them. “

After his speech, Carter still had a doubtful look. Nana was one of those types where it was unknown if they were asleep or awake, and she only looked at Roland with open, unfocused eyes. Only Anna bowed her head, as if she was thinking about something.

Well, Roland sighed, indeed, teaching too far ahead of the ideas that they understand will not bring enlightenment; it will only make people feel perplexed. The height of their knowledge determined that they couldn't understand the powerful force of nature unless it was physically in front of them. Then they would understand how amazing the nature of the hidden forces in the world were.

At this moment, the kettle hanging from the mantel gave off a clanging sound, it was the sound of a steam pinging against the lid.

“Ah, the water is boiling.” Carter walked over to remove the kettle with a fork, and soon the sound stopped. He took a piece of cloth and wrapped it around the handle, then filled everyone's cups with water.

For example, when Roland reached out with his hand to hold the cup, he could feel the temperature of the cup wall. From the first day of using fire, the principle of boiling water was known. “Boiling water”, hundreds of thousands of people had witnessed this and used it but no one thought that the gently curling and rising water vapor could also contain such a tremendous amount of

energy.

In a few hundred years, this would become the driving force behind humankind's development; in a very short period of time it would change the history of mankind. Although the principle was simple, the problem was not the limited technology. No, the problem was that the first choice for most people was to farm. But Roland was different from them, he thought, this world also had witches. Using magic to fight in a battle? That was only the way of barbarians... with magic someone could create, it could replace some of the key technologies to hasten the process of human development. This was the correct way to use magic.

They talked until the sun went down, and after they had eaten dinner together, Roland went to his bedroom.

There was no nightlife to speak of in this day and age, people didn't even have a word for it, and everyone went to sleep early. He also considered using his right as the prince to recruit a maid to do the sport, but in the end he couldn't because he was too thin-skinned to speak out.

Just as he had lit the candle in his room, he could hear behind himself the sound of applause, then someone spoke to Roland, "It was a spectacular lecture, I did not expect that his royal highness the 4th Prince was actually a learned man."

It was the voice of an unknown woman. Instantly Roland could feel cold sweat, only god knew how a stranger could get into his room without his knowledge, if not an assassin what could she be?! He immediately ran towards the door, even before he had the time

to put his hand on the doorknob, he could feel a cold wind blow near his ear. He discovered that a silver dagger was firmly inserted into the door, the distance from the dagger to his cheek was only one finger wide.

Chapter 20 - Nightingale

“Please don’t be impulsive, Your Highness, I don’t mean to hurt you, I just came here to talk with you.”

Heck, was this a way to tell people you want to talk with them? Roland swallowed his fear and slowly turned around. Under the threat of a dagger, he could only give way to the pressure and do what the other side wanted.

In the light of the dim candlelight, Roland could see the other – she was sitting on his bed, her body hidden under a robe and her head covered with a hood, so he could not see her real appearance. Her shadow which was thrown by the candlelight occupied more than half of the wall behind her.

“Who are you?”

“I do not have a name, but my sisters call me Nightingale.” She stood up and straightened out her robe, then she squatted down on one knee, and unexpectedly gave a standard noble bow, “First of all, I’m here to express my gratitude to you Roland Wimbledon, Your Highness.”

Show your gratitude? Roland noticed that some lines of her gown, due to the firelight, gave off a unique flash; they formed a pattern of three parallel triangles with an eye in the middle triangle... it seemed he had already seen it.

” The pattern on top of the coin... It is the Eye of the Holy

Mountain, which is the insignia of the Witch Cooperation Association.”

In his mind, Barov’s words appeared once again, “You’re... a witch!?”

“Ha ha ha!” she issued a series of light laughter, “Your Highness is really knowledgeable.”

Hearing the other side reveal their identity, Roland breathed a sigh of relief, she was not an assassin sent by his brothers and sisters, “Why has a witch like you come to this remote town in the Northern Mountain area? I do not know where you heard the news from, but your ability to arrive is too slow. If I really wanted to hang her, she would have been dead long ago. “

“I know. And if you had really done it, I would never talk with you...” Nightingale sat back on his bed, “The Witch Cooperation Association does not like to intervene in world affairs, especially with things related to the kingship. Honestly, for a witch to kill a prince, it would not be such hard work, but I want to honor the Witch Cooperation Association. However, if you leave a bad second impression I can still kill you.”

This was a hanging threat. Roland tried to ease the mood, “The witch, she is alive and well.”

“I know that, and in addition to her, there is another little girl.” she nodded, “I came to this place a week ago, but I did not show myself to you. But I have seen everything you have done. Although

I do not quite understand why you are not showing the usual malice against witches, no matter what, on behalf of the Witch Cooperation Association I have to thank you. “

“Since a week ago...” Roland rubbed his forehead, but also “everything he had done was seen by her?” This implied that she was always following him, but he and his guards were completely unaware of her? “Well stop, saying that you wanted to talk to with me wasn’t only for saying ‘thank you’, right?”

“Are you already tired of talking with me?” asked Nightingale while taking off her hood, “See, I do not look that awful, I will not scare you away, Your Highness.”

She was far more than ‘not that awful’, you could simply only call her beautiful. As her hood fell, her golden hair instantly cascaded down like a waterfall; the candlelight reflected by her hair made him feel dizzy; with her aquiline nose and her sparkling eyes, instead of Anna’s and Nana’s slightly childlike look, her features revealed a more mature charm. In this dim light, he could not take a close look, but her well-proportioned facial features were sufficient proof of her beauty.

Step by step Roland slowly went over to her, and in the end they were sitting on the bed side by side. Not because he was attracted to her, that would be even dangerous, no, he just simply felt that the other side had no malicious intent.

“Now you can talk.”

“Sure enough, you’re not afraid of me.” Nightingale’s voice sounded a little happy, “You and I have already seen those people who react differently... They hate us because they are afraid of us. I can see the fear in their eyes but in you...” “She couldn’t help herself, she had to reach out and gently stroke his cheek, “Roland, I only see curiosity. “

Roland embarrassedly coughed twice, and then moved his head away from her hand. Hey, don’t change the atmosphere so much, just a moment ago you were still an assassin, how can you so suddenly completely change your style?

Fortunately, the other quickly restrained her emotions, “I came here to tell you that I want to take Anna and Nana with me.”

“No!” Roland became frightened, and impulsively responded. Then he was worried that if he refused her altogether, she would be annoyed, so he added, “They have a very good life here, no one can hurt them. Besides, where do you want to take them? There is no other place safer than here. “

“I will take them to the Witch Cooperation Association. After all, their home is there,” despite Roland’s denial Nightingale didn’t get angry, instead she still continued to talk with him in a calm tone, “The other members of the Witch Cooperation Association are their companions, and there will be no discrimination or persecution, and they... no longer need to disguise themselves.”

“You and the Witch Cooperation Association don’t have a fixed home? A month ago, my guards discovered your hiding camp in the forest. They found footprints leading to the north... But in the

north, there are only the endless mountains! “

“You’re right, the Witch Cooperation Association is hiding somewhere in the mountains, for us witches it is absolutely safe there.”

“Like a wild man living in the mountains during the winter, in the end where would you be safe? Do you have clean water? Do you have enough food? Is there a warm shelter? And the Months of the Demons is coming, the entire north-west will become a dangerous place, in the end what – “here Roland suddenly paused, what was it again, what had Barov said? “only at the Holy Mountain can a witch obtain real peace. The purpose of the Witch Cooperation Association is to find the Holy Mountain together.” To hell with it, don’t do that... “Are you going into the impassable mountain range in search of the Holy Mountain?”

“I am afraid that I can’t give you an answer,” Nightingale smiled, but her look clearly told Roland that he had guessed correctly.

“If so, I will never agree.” Roland flatly overruled their plan, “It is only two months until the entire outside world is full of demonic beasts, even when you can avoid the humans in the mountains, you cannot hide yourself from the demonic beasts. How about this idea, instead of looking for the Holy Mountain during the winter, you all come to Border Town to get through the winter, and when winter has ended you all can try to find Holy Mountain again. “

This time it was Nightingale’s turn to be stunned, “The Witch Cooperation Association should be moved here? You... really are an interesting person,” for a moment she thought over it, but in

the end, she still shook her head, “Your Highness, even if you are not afraid of us witches, you can’t guarantee it for your people. I’m afraid once we are exposed to the eyes of everyone, the Church’s minions will soon come to knock on your door. “

As long as the witches can help us smoothly get through the Months of the Demons, they will realize that the witches are not the evil ones. Just before Roland could open his mouth to speak, he was stopped by Nightingale, “In addition, there is another reason why I want to take the girls away, Anna will soon turn into an adult.”

“Adulthood?”

“Yes,” it seemed that she could see the doubt in Roland’s mind, so Nightingale calmly explained, “Adulthood is the first hurdle all witches need to cross, the later they cross this hurdle, the harder it becomes to bear. Generally, people usually turn into witches at a younger age than Anna. Your Highness, do you know why we can be regarded as the devil incarnate?”

Chapter 21 - What Do You Actually Desire

When Nightingale finished, the room was silent again, only the occasional crackling of the burning candles were heard.

Roland had a serious look on his face, and he finally had a general understanding of the witches.

Most witches had their awakening during the Months of the Demons. That was, according to legend, when the door to hell was open. Generally speaking, adulthood was the dividing line for a witch, after the age of 18 any woman who hadn't awoken would probably never become a witch, but the women who awoke before they were 18 had to bear a pain, like some spirit was devouring their bodies, every year on the day of their awakening.

This unimaginable pain caused Nightingale's voice to clearly tremble when she came to this part of her explanation. According to her personal experience, it was just like something trying to break out of her body. In every blood vessel, muscle, and tendon, an unbearable pain would arise, and blood would seep out of the skin and one's eyes would protrude out of their sockets...

If you could survive all this, your body would need four to five days to recover, but if you couldn't survive it, you would not only die from miserable torture, but moreover your moment of death would be a spectacle too horrible to endure.

Nightingale had witnessed the death of several companions; their bodies would lose the ability to support themselves, and they

would change into round and bulging meatballs. Blood mixed with other body fluids and internal organs would spray out of every possible hole, and the air around the body would turn into black fog. When finally everything possible was violently ejected, only a layer of black, burned epidermis would be left on the ground.

This was the reason why witches were regarded as the devil's incarnate.

Upon the sight of this scene, ordinary people would naturally be terrified, so who would care about the real cause of their death? In addition, the church is adding fuel to the fire, claiming that the witches were possessed by evil spirits, so over time, the witches became evil incarnations.

Regardless of how outsiders viewed them, this kind of torture was real; witches were generally short-lived because of this. Every year it would become harder to endure, so many witches would choose to end their own lives.

When a witch became 18 and turned into an adult, the pain of the devouring evil spirits was known as the most difficult checkpoint to cross. In fact, the magic the witches obtained before the checkpoint was not complete. Only in adulthood would this power become stable. After the stability of their magic, there was a substantial increase in their power, and there was even a possibility of developing new branches of magic.

Unfortunately, the stability process was very painful, the pain of feeling their own body be devoured surpassed the limit what ordinary people could bear, and many witches would die on the

day of their adulthood.

Roland, after listening to this explanation was silent for a long time, he only whispered, “In ancient books it is recorded that witches at the Holy Mountain get eternal peace, without having to suffer the demon’s torture, is this really true?”

“No one knows this, because the Holy Mountain has only appeared in legends. But if we take them to the camp of the Witches Cooperation Association, their chances of survival will be much greater. If the witches didn’t need to hide ourselves, if we could live freely, then the devouring pain of the evil spirits would be much weaker compared to the past. “

For a moment Roland was terribly upset, his plan would not work without Anna’s and Nana’s help, but because of his plan they would need to bear an enormous risk.

He really couldn’t help it. In the end he weakly said, “Anna is downstairs, I’ll ask her to come over. If she is willing to, you can take her and leave. As for Nana, I will have to see her tomorrow.”

“Thank you for your understanding, I really had the right impression of you,” Nightingale stood up to express her gratitude.

At this time Anna had yet to fall asleep, so when Roland went to get her, she was sitting properly at the table copying something. She looked surprised to see Roland. When she heard she had to go to the Prince’s room, Anna did not ask any questions and obediently followed him to his room.

When she entered the room to find that there was a person there, the young girl was truly frightened. Roland took her hand and briefly introduced them to each other, and the three encircled a round table and sat down. Then Nightingale repeated the words they had said before, "... in the camp, and there are a lot of people like you, they are your partners."

"This should roughly summarize your case, Miss Anna, though you and I have signed an employment contract, in the case of such a potentially life-threatening situation, I have to respect your opinion. In case you agree -"

"I won't go."

Roland blanked out, "What did you say -"

"I said I won't go," said Anna at lightning speed to interrupt Roland's sentence, "I want to stay here."

"Anna, I'm not lying to you." Nightingale frowned, "I can feel your magic increasing in your body, it's getting close to maturity. Two months after the beginning of the Months of the Demons will be your day of adulthood, if we get you to the camp before then, it will be much safer. "

Anna didn't pay any attention to what Nightingale said. Instead, she turned her head and looked at Roland.

“Your Highness, do you remember when you asked me if I would like to go back to Carl’s college, with Nana and the other children to learn together?”

Roland nodded.

“I did not answer, but afterwards you spoke about... living like a normal person, but I do not care about that.” said Anna with her smooth and natural voice, “I just want to stay at Your Highness’ side, nothing more.”

Roland had thought that he understood Anna’s personality before, but now he realized that he really did not understand her.

Looking in her eyes, he couldn’t read any emotions. There was no dependence, nor did she adore him, he couldn’t see anything... he only could see tranquility all the way to the end.

He remembered the scene when they met for the first time. At that time, she also had her calm expression.

The difference now was that in this moment her face was full of life, just like a budding flower. She still didn’t fear death, but right now she wasn’t waiting for her execution like last time.

“The devouring by evil spirits will not kill me,” said Anna with confidence, “I’ll beat it.”

Nightingale closed her eyes and took a deep breath, “...Well,

that's enough, understand!"

"Will you leave alone, just like that?" Roland asked.

"No, I have a good life here." she drew her hood over her head and stood up, "Anyway, before the end of this month the demon camp will not move."

"Why?" Roland had a surprise, did she also want to monitor them throughout the winter?

"I think people who have not experienced the process of adulthood can't understand how dangerous it is. I myself was on the edge of death again and again, I also witnessed the death of my companions, when that day comes, I may be able to help her. If... "Nightingale shrugged her shoulders," If she cannot make it, I also have experience in handling the funeral."

She went to the door, and retrieved her own dagger, then she turned to Roland and curtseyed once again, "In that way, I have to say good-bye." And then her body gradually disappeared into the darkness, like mist, she didn't leave the slightest trace.

Was this Nightingale's ability? Roland looked pensive, there was no sound or trace of her. he was simply a natural assassin. And from the first-hand view he got of her dagger throwing technique, he concluded that she definitely had received training in it. Was the Witch Cooperation Association not only gathering witches, but also developing their own force? Or had Nightingale already mastered these skills before she entered the Witch Cooperation

Association?

Roland could not find any useful information from the relevant information of their organization and the memories of the former Roland, but he had the premonition that he would absolutely meet this organization again, as long as he stuck to his path of recruiting witches.

“It’s already late, you should quickly go back to sleep,” Roland patted the girl’s head.

It was somewhat unexpected for him when Anna brushed his hand away and left the room without saying a word.

When the door was closed, and the lights were cut off, she was enveloped by her shadow. She gently leaned herself against the door, and her lake-like eyes were no longer calm.

Anna raised her arms to hide her face, and whispered with a barely audible voice.

“...Fool.”

Chapter 22 - Declaration

The next day the rain finally stopped, and Border Town became lively once again. Many villagers gathered on the square, talking while awaiting the 4th prince's speech.

The day before, Roland had posted a notice regarding this presentation on the bulletin board. Anyone who came to the square and listened to his speech would receive a bowl of wheat porridge and half a loaf of bread. For the townspeople, this was equivalent to a free lunch, thus there were much more people here to watch than the time when the witch was hanged.

When it was close to noon, Roland ascended onto a previously prepared stage.

Faced with the dense mass of people before him, he would be lying if he said he wasn't nervous. Most of the time in his former life he only dealt with computer monitors, even if he attended a meeting he was always sitting in the audience to applaud, so facing such a kind of battle was a first.

But he had to step on stage, if he wanted most of the people to stay in Border Town, they would need a greater defense, and without motivation they would all leave.

Roland waved with his arm, and everyone quieted down.

He had practiced this scene many times, but when he stepped on the stage, his mouth was still a little dry, "People of my territory,

good afternoon. I'm the 4th Prince of Graycastle, Roland Wimbledon. At this moment we gather together, because there is an important message I have to tell you! ”

“Four days ago the ambassador of Longsong Stronghold arrived, his mission was to receive the mined ore. We all know that a month ago, we suffered from a disastrous accident, the collapse of the mine in the Northern Mountain Slope. Even today, the mining area isn't fully restored so we can't produce as much as we used to? The result of the accident was that we only output the equivalent of two months in the last quarter. ”

“I explained the situation to the messenger, since I hoped he would loan us three months' worth of food, and we would pay the missing ore at the end of winter, but he refused! There was no room for negotiation, he refused to set aside any more food – just like they did two years ago. ”

The crowd burst in alarm, clearly everyone's suffering from two years ago was still remembered.

“This time it will be even worse. The Longsong Stronghold astrologer told me that this time the Months of the Demons will be even longer, most likely lasting more than four months. That means, this time all of us will face two months of a food gap. Two years ago, we lost 20% of the population. Someone lost a brother, someone lost a child, but this time, how much will we lose? ”

“No! Your Highness, you have to save us!” Someone shouted from underneath, then more people shouted, “Your Highness, I beg you to help us!”

It seemed that planting some people in the crowd, who would speak in his interest was the right choice. Roland raised his hand again, suppressing the voices of the people, “Of course, I will not leave my entrusted people, I will never do that! You may not know, but Longsong Stronghold annually ships wheat and bread to us, and they carried away the ore we mine, but it isn’t equivalent to the normal market price. According to the market price, two months of ore should be enough for half a year of food! I have sold the ore to Willow Town, their cargo ship full of food will soon arrive at Border Town. In addition to bread, there will be cheese, honey and meat! For a whole winter, everyone can eat one’s fill! ”

The square burst into cheers.

“However, this is equivalent to breaking off relations with Longsong Stronghold, so they will not accept any person during the winter. As a result, this winter, we will all have to stay in Border Town. Most people have been at the west border of our town, there we are currently establishing a strong wall. I know many people are anxious of the invasion from the demonic beasts, but we can block them. I want to tell you, that the demonic beasts are not much more powerful than normal forest beasts. Although they have rough skin and thick meat, they cannot climb walls and they also cannot eat stones. They have a thick skin but they are just a group of easy to aim at targets! ”

“Tell me, my beloved people, are you willing to hide in Longsong Stronghold, living in shacks and starving to a useless death? Or under my leadership will you protect your loved ones and children, guarding Border Town until the last minute? I promise, everyone who stays until the end of the Months of the Demons and protects

the other townspeople on the city wall will get a reward of 25 silver royals. If someone sacrifices himself while defending the town, his family will receive a compensation of five gold royals! ”

“Your Highness, we want to fight with you!” Under the guidance of his own people placed in the crowd, more and more people swore to wage war. Seeing the atmosphere surge up, Roland timely ordered to issue lunch. He did not expect that everyone would stay in Border Town. As long as half of the people were willing to stay, he would have a chance to obstruct the demonic beasts from moving forward.

While Petrov was bringing back the message to the six noble families only to be met with laughter, he naturally did not know that the 4th Prince was inciting the townspeople.

“You said that the incompetent prince actually wants to throw off the demonic beasts alone? Daring to build walls before winter, I don’t know, should I praise him for his courage or mock him for overestimating himself?”

“His Royal Highness’ lack of courage is a known fact, when did the 4th prince find his guts? He is just stupid, and nothing more!”

“Yes, he did not even have a stonemason, he is only leaning on piling up unpolished stones and pasting wet mud between it, I’m afraid this piled up stone wall will collapse immediately.”

“Anyway, it’s a good thing. If he flees to Longsong Stronghold, we will be at the mercy of nature. But if he dies in the border town... we can soon end this farce.”

After he had meditated about the problem, the duke suddenly spoke, “Petrov, what do you think?”

Petrov was startled, he did not think that the duke of Longsong Stronghold would ask for his opinion, “Well, I originally wanted to maintain a monopoly, as long as we could get the ore for thirty percent below the market price, it would still be a deal worthy for us, but...” His mind calculated some ideas,” but His Highness does not intend to sell all the ore to Longsong Stronghold, he is even selling the ore for a 50% lower than the market price, which means, he has plans to make a substantial increase in the ore production next year. As long as they are able to increase the production to the double of the former years, we may earn more than ever before. But he also intends to sell their own production of iron, iron production is hot in demand, and resale would also be very easy. But... these are not the important points. ”

“Oh? What is important?”

“If he can hold Border Town, it would also be very good news for us. We wouldn’t have to focus on dealing with demonic beasts every year, which can save us a huge amount of expenditure. A second advantage would be that the vast amount land between the stronghold and the Border Town will be open for all of us. Whether it be cultivating the land or using it to settle new people, both choices would be good. This could greatly ease the current status of the overcrowded stronghold population.” Petrov recited

his ideas one by one, “And the 4th prince will not always stay in Border Town. The fight for the throne will only last for five years, after five years we would get a more prosperous Border Town, and then we could include Border Town into the stronghold. Then the territory of the stronghold would become the third largest territory of the whole kingdom. So my advice is...” He glanced at the Duke, and said carefully, “The stronghold should send staff to help His Highness, and we should collaborate in the defense of Border Town.”

“That’s right,” said the duke, “but those are the thoughts of a merchant, only interested in gains and losses.”

When he came to this point, he straightened his body, his eyes slowly swept to each of the participants and his tone became awe-inspiring, “However, I didn’t get my status of today by weighing all the benefits with the losses. Why do I have to do business with a person who is out of my control? Some rules must be obeyed, and if they are broken the trespasser must be punished. Whether Border Town is prosperous or broken is not important, what is important is that no one should ever think about taking the control away from me – even if he is a prince, he is no exception. ”

Chapter 23 - New Source Of Power

“Come on, try to join these two iron plates together,” Roland said.

Anna’s finger pressed on the iron seams. A flame was ejected from her finger, melting the interface at a speed visible to the eyes.

“Reduce the firepower and start again with the reverse side.”

Anna nodded her head and did it once more. The two iron plates were firmly welded together at a 90-degree angle.

Roland carefully examined the interface and found that the effect was just as he had imagined – a perfect weld without any flaws. With a little polishing, the fluid traces of molten iron could rub off. There was no difference with a modern welding technique.

“Very good, Miss Anna, simply excellent!” Roland excitedly exclaimed, “Next, we should also weld this two iron panels together.”

“What is it? An iron... bucket?”

“No, it is a cylinder,” corrected Roland.

“Cylinder?” repeated Anna, puzzled.

“Yes, the cylinder can be filled with air,” Roland pointed to another square piece of iron, “Do you see the small hole above it? The air can enter the cylinder through that small hole, and push the piston. Well, and since the piston diameter is slightly smaller than the cylinder’s diameter, it can move freely inside. “

Even the genius Anna, in front of so many unknown words, had question marks above her head, “these... cylinder, piston and so on, what do they do?”

“They are needed for the purpose of manufacturing a machine that can move automatically.”

The steam engine brought the first industrial revolution, it was the driving force behind human development, completely replacing humans and animals in the workforce.

It was a schematic diagram that each mechanic engineer was familiar with, to describe it in simple words, it was a larger version of a kettle. After boiling the water, the produced steam would be induced into the cylinder. There, it would push a piston that is connected to a pole. Like this, thermal energy was turned into mechanical energy.

The principle was very simple, but it did not mean that it was easy to manufacture. Its difficulty laid in the sealing of the cylinder and piston, as well as the production of the gas pipeline. Without proper metal processing skills and only relying on manual forging, manufacturing a usable cylinder would only be a dream.

However, with the help of Anna's ability, he could make up for the lack of their manufacturing skills.

After much advance planning, Roland came up with a design using four iron plates of the same size, like this, so the smithy could easily grind it. Then the iron plates would be welded together at a 90-degree angle by Anna. Like this, it was possible to get a highly stiff square cylinder. With the help of Anna, he didn't need to use the traditional production process. They created first a tubular boring machine, and then post processed it to create a circular cylinder. The other big parts, too, could be divided into small pieces and then welded together. In this way, it was even possible to produce them in a small workshop. In this way, they were able to produce all of the components required for the steam engine.

In fact, prior to the invention of welding, people could only rely on connecting small pieces by bolting or riveting. Since the internal cylinder must be smooth, normal connection methods obviously couldn't do this.

The only problem was the gas pipeline. Its production process was nothing special, it needed to be heated up until it was red, and then the groove could be hammered into the right shape; this was also the method to produce a front-loading flintlock gun barrel. Later the barrel just needed straightening and counterbored rifling etc., nothing that was too complicated.

The problem was that it was impossible for Roland to call the blacksmith into the castle's back garden, since it was still not known that Anna hadn't been executed. Blacksmithing was not

one of their strengths, but in a desperate attempt, they had to let the chief knight do it, under Roland's own command.

After waiting for three days, Roland finally had the first steam engine ever standing in his back garden.

“This is the powerful machine you were talking about?” Carter frowned while looking at the strange machine, but he had affirmed first hand that this machine had nothing to do with magic. Each of the iron plates were personally molded by himself, and to him, it only looked like a sealed furnace. It was impossible for the devil to have any interest in it.

But how could it move a pile of lump iron upwards? It looked very clumsy and had no feet, was it possible that it could fly?

But in Roland's eyes, this seemingly simple machine exuded the beauty of the modern industry. Standing on the shoulders of giants, he naturally did not need to invent the Newcomen steam engine — or the Watt steam engine, instead he built an improved steam engine. His first prototype was already a high-pressure steam engine with a dual connecting rod and a slide valve. To Make it better than most of the original steam engines, the key laid in some of newer innovative ideas.

“Soon you will understand it.”

Roland poured a bucket of water into the steam room and told Anna to ignite the firewood.

Ten minutes later, the water was at a rolling boil. Soon, a creaking sound could be heard from the cylinder. Roland knew it was the sound of the thermal expansion of the cylinder. The thin iron piston's expansion was far greater than the cylinder's and it would eventually press firmly against the cylinder wall.

“Isn't this a water boiler? I did not think it would really be a furnace,” Carter muttered.

When the cylinder was full of steam, an excited scene appeared. The piston rod began to push outwards, and when the motion was at its apex, another rod would pull the slide valves, allowing the steam to push the piston inwards again. The wheel connected to the two poles would rotate very quickly through this motion, and with increased power, the speed very quickly reached its peak.

The machine made an ear-piercing humming sound, and white gas was ejected, producing a kind of unstoppable and imposing aura. “That's what you called... hidden forces in nature?” asked Anna, dumbfounded.

The chief knight's face was full of wonder, the great iron wheel that he needed to spend a good deal of strength to install, was now rotating like it was as light as a feather. Standing next to the wheel he could even feel a new breeze – this only showed the astounding power of the steam engine.

In his heart, a trace of anxiety gradually arose.

His Highness had said that it could replace the power of humans

and animals, and it seemed he hadn't lied. When placed on a horse-drawn chariot, it would be very hard for 10 knights to resist its brute force.

Training a qualified knight needed fifteen years, but the manufacturing of such a machine only needed three days. If the blacksmith only worked part time, it would still only need a week.

It didn't require feeding and wasn't afraid of cold or hunger. It also wasn't afraid of arrows and swords. Just install a ram in front of it, and it could bring rampage on the battlefield.

As a traditional knight... was his existence still necessary?

In the evening, when Roland returned to the bedroom, Nightingale was once again waiting for him.

This time, she did not wear her hood, and she was smiling and sitting at the table. Her hands fiddled with a few parchments, "It seems that the outside rumors really cannot be believed. They say the 4th Prince is ignorant and has a bad character, in fact, he shouldn't have any learning or skills. In fact, compared with a court great master he would not have time for civilities. This drawing on this paper, are these the plans for the steam stove? You call it... steam engine, right? "

Shoot! Can't I even get a little privacy? Coming and going like you want, do you think this is your home?! In his heart, Roland

cursed her endlessly, but he still replied with a calm face, “Yes those are the plans, but without Anna’s help, they would forever be drawings only.”

“What can it do?”

“A lot, it can help with ore transportation, drainage, metal fabrication, forging, everywhere where strength is required it can play a role.”

“Then I will take it,” with this words Nightingale took the parchment and placed it in her robe, “the Witch Cooperation Association has witches with the power of fire too.”

“Hey–“

She shook her head to stop Roland’s protest, “Of course, I’m not only taking your stuff, take a look at this first before complaining.” She put a small amount of white stuff on the table.

When Roland went over to the table, he found out that it was actually a roll of paper.

He gently expands the roll, and swept through its content, “This is...”

“A secret letter delivered by pigeons,” Nightingale explained to him in a happy tone, “the recipient was your maid Tyre, tsk, it looks like your harem isn’t loyal.”

“I have not touched her,” Roland frowned.

Tyre, he could remember that she seemed to follow him from a very early age, and the former 4th Prince appeared to be interested in her, but unfortunately he failed to succeed in conquering her, he could only lightly harass her several times. Here in Border Town, to prevent the long wait for his own personal maid, she got the room next door to him. He did not expect that this was actually an arrangement made by one of his siblings.

Although this letter was not signed, according to the content, he could judge, that it was sent by one of his siblings. In the letter it revealed that the author was very unhappy with the last failure, but the plans for the riot in Longsong Stronghold were not allowed to fail again.

Well, in fact, the first plan must have succeeded, he thought, or else he would have never become Roland Wimbledon.

It was unlikely that this letter was forged by Nightingale, because only the people who were involved in this conspiracy could have been aware of the first assassination plan. And if Nightingale wanted to kill him, it wouldn't be a problem for her.

“How could you steal this from her?”

“Your maid Tyre isn't stupid, her intention was to burn the letter after reading it. Unfortunately, she looked away when I was just behind her,” She made an act of sweeping something, “So, how do

you want to handle this? Do you need my help to ‘deal’ with her? “

Roland naturally understood what she meant by ‘deal’, so he hesitated for a moment, then he finally nodded, ” I have to trouble you.” He did not have the confidence to do this kind of thing himself, “if you can... ask her who the person in the dark is. “

“As you wish, Your Highness,” Nightingale smiled while giving a salute, “Well, this will be the reward for the drawing of the steam engine.”

Chapter 24 - Development Plan

On the next morning, when Roland woke up, he wasn't served by his maid Tyre. Instead, it was an elderly maid.

When he stepped out of the bedroom, his chief knight Carter was already waiting for him.

"Your Highness, I have bad news to deliver," Carter spoke with a low voice, "Your maid Tyre died last night."

"What?" Roland's eyelids jumped up, although he already knew the result before, in his heart, he still felt a little uncomfortable. After all, she died because of his orders.

"She fell from the balcony in her own room. We couldn't find any signs of fighting nor the guards saw any outsiders near the scene of the accident. So... it seems that she fell from the balcony by herself, it was an accident."

The knight reported the results of his investigation, and at the same time, he searched for any weird fluctuations in Roland's eyes. Roland certainly knew what Carter was looking for. When they were in Graycastle, it was known to everyone that the 4th Prince wanted to take Tyre by force. In this day and age, it was an ordinary affair for a prince and a maid to have a relationship, this kind of matter was of least interest to others. After all, almost no nightlife existed, so there was nothing to do besides eating one's fill and doing the thing between man and woman. And not only with their own woman, the prince and the other upper nobility

would exchange their women, sometimes they would even make an open party, so an affair between a prince and his maid was nothing more than a simple laugh.

The former 4th Prince was already known for being more moderate in this kind of matter, and later he was even replaced with Cheng Yang, who had never touched a woman after he became Roland – with the exception of Tyre, all the other maids could be described as shabby. In addition, after his crossing he directly had to face the Months of the Demons, so his mind was almost only filled with development plans, and he had no chance to enjoy the romantic life of a noble.

“That is really regretful,” Roland put on a look of mourning, “In the future the senior maid who served me this morning should take over Tyre’s position. She is the new head maid.”

Carter nodded and left after saluting.

When Roland stepped into his office, he once more saw that Nightingale sat on his mahogany (redwood) table.

“What are the results of your interrogation?”

“Nothing, she directly killed herself when she saw me,” her frustration was clearly audible, “She acted too fast, there wasn’t even the slightest hesitation.”

“You actually didn’t make her fall?” Roland walked around her

and sat in the armchair.

“I tied her up,” Nightingale placed her body closer to him, “but who could have known that she had hidden poison in her teeth. So I had to fake an accidental fall.”

“I thought you were experienced. So, do you think you did enough to get paid?”

“Hey, don’t talk like that! Though I couldn’t get anything directly from her mouth, that doesn’t mean I didn’t get anything.” While chuckling, Nightingale put a folded sheet of paper in front of Roland, “I found this hidden in her room.”

Roland spread out the paper and saw that it was a letter. In the letter, Tyre referred to the recipient as sister, but the content was just plain gossip. However, he noted that the other person repeatedly referred to the sea, such as ‘the scenery was beautiful to view’, ‘her favorite entertainment was staying on the and beach watching the sunset’, and other things like this.

Finally, Tyre asked when she could see her older sister again since she was missing her very much. When Roland thought of the territories his brothers and sisters governed, he was sure he knew who the conspirator was, “It should be my older sister Garcia, right?”

“That is probably the case, since your two brothers cannot see the sea. I guess, 3rd princess Garcia Wimbledon took Tyre’s sister hostage and hid her away. Judging from the decisive style of her

suicide, it is unlikely to be a random arrangement. What I mean is, before she was placed as your maid, she had at least two to three years of ample training.”

Roland sighed softly. Indeed as expected of the fight for the throne, it would not end without bloodshed. Even if he didn't fight, it didn't mean that his siblings wouldn't drag him into it. To get the throne, his brothers and sisters would stop at nothing. He was afraid that something similar would happen again in the future.

“Ah, someone's coming to speak with you. You'll have to excuse me, Your Highness.”

Nightingale spoke in a teasing tone and blew hot air towards Roland, and then she suddenly disappeared in the blink of an eye.

Although it wasn't the first time he saw her doing this, but seeing her vanish in broad daylight, left Roland feeling shocked. He hesitated for a moment, and then he stretched out a finger towards the empty table, halfway his finger was stopped by a very soft touch, “Your Highness, you cannot do this, you will make Anna very sad.”

Well, it seemed like her ability was invisibility and not teleportation, thought Roland, otherwise it really would be too powerful.

Soon a knock was heard from the door, “Your Highness, it's me Barov.”

Roland withdrew his finger and hid any expression that was on his face, “Come in.”

When the Assistant Minister stepped into the office, he was holding a large bundle of files. Even before he had sat down, he began his government report of the last week. Roland also turned his thoughts back, listening attentively to Barov’s report. After living for a month in this world, he found himself able to keep up with Barov’s rhythm, unlike the beginning where he was confused and disoriented, feeling completely out of place.

In general, the finance of Border Town had a certain degree of improvement. The main point for this was the selling of the ore and rough stones to Willow Town. As payment, they had received nearly 200 gold royals. After they had used the money to buy food and to pay off wages, there were still ninety gold royals remaining.

Barov was in good mood, with money to spare, getting through this winter wouldn’t be too difficult.

But Roland was destined to not let him leave in good mood, “I want to pick a group of townspeople to help fight against the demonic beasts and from now on they will only have to concentrate on training. Their instructor will be my chief knight, and I will give him special instructions on how to train them. You will need to make a list of equipment or gear. These people will need leather armor and pikes. They also need to have two sets of winter clothes, so they can change clothes.”

“Your Highness, this... according to the convention, isn't a temporary recruitment only allowed as the final option ?”

“If you send them to the battlefield without further training, they will only be a chaotic mob. Do you think it's possible to scare off the demonic beasts with numbers only? After the order collapses, we will only have more trouble.”

“Your Highness, do you really insist on staying in Border Town?” asked Barov hesitantly.

“If we cannot restrain the demonic beasts, of course, I will retreat, but I do not think that we cannot even deal with a few variations mutations? of normal animals.”

“According to your future plans, we will need a greater amount of money.”

Hearing that the other side was such a miser, Roland had to laugh “These are necessary expenses, go and do it.”

In his own treasury were more than 300 gold royals which were mainly used to pay for the construction of walls. The required steam engine materials and components ordered from the blacksmith shop were also paid for from his own pockets. For the first steam engine, he had to spend almost twenty gold royals, and he would need at least three engines.

The invention of the steam engine was a key component of the

industrial revolution, this was true, but it didn't mean that the steam engine was equivalent to the industrial revolution. In history, the United Kingdom was looking for a possibility to replace the people and livestock involved in order to increase the productivity in mining operations . When Watt improved the steam engine, he immediately received a huge amount of orders. This new power was also spread to various industries in a very short period of time.

At this point of time, there was no basis for the industrial revolution in a small Border Town. It could even be said that industry did not exist. So Roland did not expect to make a pot of gold by selling the steam engine, he just wanted to put this machine in the northern mining area to pull ore and gravel. And when the mining production was increased, he would expand the scale of use of the steam engines. It would be the equivalent of the promotion of the industrial development from top to bottom.

Chapter 25 - Militia

“These are the people you selected?” when Roland looked at the group of civilians dressed in shabby clothes, all his courage flew away immediately.

“Your Highness, these are the people who fulfilled your requirements,” said Carter. He began to count them with his fingers, “male, no criminal records, between 18 – 40 years of age, no disabilities... I carefully inspected all of them.”

Well, he knew he shouldn't have expected too much. After all, this world's productivity was much too low. Having enough to eat was already a difficult task, so wearing shabby clothes was just normal. As a prince he had ignored such things. Just leaving his castle he could see many people who only wore clothes that did not cover the whole body, begging for something to eat. In fact, in the capital of the Kingdom of Graycastle there existed a job as a corpse carrier – the only thing they would do was to collect the people who starved to death and then burn their bodies every day.

So what was the general fighting power in this world? Roland closed his eyes and reviewed his plan carefully again, ‘Ah... probably a little stronger than a high-level street fighter’. Generally, when the Lords decided to wage war (or more precisely fight – Roland thought naming their little fights as war would be overstating it), they would summon all the aristocracy placed under their jurisdiction in their territory. A Lord would always split his territory into many smaller territories and select lower ranks of nobility to govern them, like a Duke would select Earls, the Earls would select Viscounts, and they again would select Barons, and so on.

These nobles usually had a group of knights and mercenaries as their personal army. They were the main force in combats, equipped with a complete suit of armor and sophisticated weapons. At the same time, they would recruit civilians and farmers who worked on their territory to help out during combat – in fact, they were used to deliver food supplies to the troops and when needed they would even fill up the holes in the front lines as cannon fodder. The most people who died on the battlefield were the people used as cannon fodder. Fighting between nobles would rarely result in someone's death; they generally would be caught and later exchanged for ransom.

Roland did not expect help from the several other nobles in Border Town to fight against the demonic beasts. In fact, they had no relationship with Border Town. Most of the local Barons were living in Longsong Stronghold. The stronghold was also under the jurisdiction of the regional aristocracy.

An all-civilian force was in this day and age a very imaginative thing. After all, they were stupid and ignorant, failed to understand strategies, nor could they understand the commanding structure, and they also hadn't received professional combat training. How could they compare to a knight who was trained in the art of the sword from when he was ten years old?

Carter who stood near Roland whispered some advice to him, "Your Highness, this project is not feasible. You look at them and tell me, which of them can hold and balance a sword? I'm afraid that when they encounter the demonic beasts, many of them will desert us, and at that time it will affect the stability of our defense. I suggest that we hire professional mercenaries from Willow Town

or elsewhere to guard the walls and let these people do their normal chores. “

“No, I’ll use them,” Roland refused Carter’s suggestion. He didn’t have a good opinion of the mercenaries who worked for money and did not love the land, and besides, he didn’t form his army to only deal with the demonic beasts – throughout history it was seen that only a force whose member came from their own civilities would be strong and full of vitality. Whether it was the feudal forces, the forces from the not-very-distant past or modern army troops, there were countless examples which verified this rule.

“Well, you have the final say,” said Carter while shrugging with his shoulders. “Then I will start to train them from tomorrow onwards? Although I don’t know how useful that will be...”

“With a sword? No, you will first take them all for long distance running.” Roland suddenly thought of the fact that his chief knight never had experienced these kinds of training exercises. Without any better options he had to change his plan, “Try to find the hunter from last time and bring him to me. You both will be the first to look at how I will handle the training.”

Today’s experience may be even more inconceivable than what happened in the last two decades combined.

He actually saw His Highness, The 4th Prince Roland Wimbledon from close range. He passed directly by himself and even smiled to him. My God, was the prince drunk?!

Three days ago, when he heard the speech of the 4th Prince on the square, he knew that this winter would be different from the past. This time, they would not go to Longsong Stronghold, instead, they would spend the long winter here. The truth was that he didn't understand most of the reasons mentioned by the prince, but he supported from the bottom of his heart the result of this decision. His own brother died two years ago in the slums of Longsong Stronghold after a whole month without any food supply. They could only rely on the hard-earned coppers he got from unloading goods at the docks. With them, he was able to buy some black bread and share it with his brother. But the winter was too cold. The wind would blow through the many holes in their slum shack. Without enough to eat and with no possibility to maintain their body temperature they couldn't survive. When his brother got sick, he fell into a coma and never woke up again.

Here in Border Town, he at least had a house built out of soil brick. There was no fear of the falling temperature or the many days with snow fall. He also saw many ships filled with wheat docking at the pier, and then the wheat was moved in batches into the castle. Therefore, when he heard that the 4th prince was recruiting a militia force, he directly registered himself.

Of course, he had to give up his job as a gravel producer. But the temptation was too big, after all, they would get a monthly salary of 10 silver royals. This was comparable to a skilled mud artisan! He was no longer a young boy. He was only waiting until the spring of next year to marry his future wife Sheryl, a tavern maid. Now he had no problem to save some money.

As for the requirements and the future tasks of the militia shown

on the notice, he did not pay any attention to them. Anyway, it was to carry the burden of protecting the civilians on behalf of the lord. They had to patrol along the city wall and keep the beasts from climbing up the wall, and withstand the crazy attacks of the demonic beasts.

He had to go through a very strict screening process. Alone, the sight of some knights was enough to make people feel afraid. Fortunately, he had a sturdy physique and got through the review, but many scrawny guys were carried away by the knights. In the end, only 100 men were recruited.

But he had never expected that the person who would train them would be His Royal Highness the Prince himself!

For their training, they were brought to a grass field west of Border Town. In the background the city wall was being built, and in front of them was an unceasingly and continuously extending forest.

The prince ordered everyone to line up, and then he went to the site to rest. Just a few days ago they had heavy rain, so the ground was still damp and muddy. The water infiltrated his shoes along the seam at the soles, which made his whole body feel uncomfortable. The stance they were ordered to take was not a normal one. Their hands needed to be aligned vertically, attached to the sides of their thighs, while their backs were required to be perfectly straight.

Only a quarter of an hour later they already felt terribly fatigued. This was even harder than breaking stone with a hammer. But he

gritted his teeth and tried to hold on. After all, His Royal Highness had said before that those who moved would get no egg for lunch. God, it had been so long since he had eaten an egg. Apparently, all the people around him felt the same way. Although they staggered, most of them still endured.

When the prince declared it was time to rest, he found out that his back was already drenched in sweat and the whole standing time wasn't even long, at most it was two-quarters of an hour. Those who couldn't persevere till the final moment were annoyed. It seemed as if they could see the eggs rolling away from them.

He just didn't understand. Why did they have to practice this strange stance? Only standing was enough to get several bags of food?

If it wasn't for his Royal Highness training them, he would have already stood up and begun to argue noisily.

Unexpectedly, after a short break, the second command His Highness gave was even more eccentric. He asked all the people to continue standing in a line. This time, as long as all of them persevered till the end, they would all get another egg added for lunch. As long as there was a person who gave up, everyone would lose the opportunity to get an additional egg.

He heard many people beside him swallowing their saliva.

Hell, was this a popular game in the ranks of the nobility? Leading them all around with a carrot on a stick? Damn it, he was

not a stupid donkey!

... But in the case that everyone was able to do it, wouldn't there be two eggs to eat?

This was simply the devil's temptation! Wiping his overflowing saliva away, he decided to fight for the two eggs!

Chapter 26 - The Lessons Learnt From History

“Your Highness, what is the meaning of this?” Before Carter only thought that the prince merely acted arbitrarily and alone, but now he thought he had become whimsical.

In the theory of how to train a soldier, the chief knight didn't think that there was a way more professional than their own. His family had a complete set of traditional training methods, from the age of ten to fifteen years, there would be only five years to develop the body and master all kinds of weapon used by a soldier. If they were trained for more than five years, then they would become a top soldier, known as a Knight – of course, the trainees cannot have a civilian background.

Looking at the group of morons in front of him, who only had thoughts of eating eggs on their mind, Carter became angry! After all... eggs are expensive!

Roland spoke directly into his ear, “Take a good look and remember everything. This is the kind of training which should be performed in the next few days. Of course, some details will change. I will list them for you on a paper.”

In the age of cold weapons, were two or three months of training enough to train a group of good soldiers? Roland did not think about this question and neither did he need one of those Spartan warriors dressed in underpants who could rip apart wild animals with their bare hands. The individual combat strength of Roland's people may not be strong but they must be well disciplined and

execute every order without fail.

Most of the time the group's strength is more important than the individual strength. So, he needed them to quickly form a unit. To accomplish this task quickly and move over to military training for improving the current situation was the best choice. Out of his personal experience, he knew that one month would be enough to form a group of people from all over the country into a strong cohesive unit. Regardless of the process, the goal was clear.

And when this group of people learned to follow orders, Roland could start to implement the next step of his plan.

Van'er ultimately failed to get a second egg to eat.

This time, they had to stay double the amount of time of the previous round until someone's legs went weak and he could no longer persevere.

Just at this time, the 4th prince allowed everyone to get some rest and then he ordered his attendants to serve lunch. This successfully transferred the anger from the weakling to the anticipation of eating. At this point, Van'er started to suspect that His Highness probably had never intended to let them get a second egg.

The lunch was packed in four huge barrels, which were carried by carriages out of town. In addition to the food, the carriages also

contained many bowls and spoons.

Van'er licked his lips, ready to jump on the carriages. But he along with everyone else was stopped by the chief knight, who stood in front of them.

His Royal Highness the Prince ordered everyone to line up in four rows and to come forward one by one to pick up their cutlery. Whoever disturbed the order would be forced to step back to the end of the line and get their food last.

The rows were very noisy as everyone squeezed in to get a good position. Van'er had very good luck, he stood in the forefront of the outermost row. Of course, some people expressed their intense resentment. So within the ranks, the sounds of people fighting with words and movements could be heard. Soon the knights and several guards rushed into the crowd picking out the rioters to be sent to the back of the line.

Fool, thought Van'er when he saw the man at the forefront of the rioters. He recognized him. He was the best street fighter in the town, also known as 'Insane Fist'. He usually relied on brute force to stir up trouble everywhere.

Now, only barehanded against knights and guards armed with swords, he gave of a pitiful picture. Look at his poor appearance now!

He felt that he had already grasped His Highness's preference.

That was to become a unit.

Standing straight, side by side, the team had to form lines. Everyone had to line up to get something to eat, always keeping order, never stepping out... Van'er had previously heard from a knowledgeable businessman that some of the nobility had a strange hobby. And that was that everything had to be arranged in order, everything which stood out would be forced back into place.

In Van'er's opinion, this kind of person was simply bored and had nothing better to do. So they would even deliberately find some trouble to occupy themselves.

He had not expected that His Royal Highness would be such a person.

When the lids of the barrels were opened, Van'er could smell the strong aroma of the food.

When the aroma scattered, he almost lost himself to temptation. The crowd also became restless, but simultaneously a roar to be quiet came from the chief knight. Van'er thought that they probably had to line up again.

Sure enough, the 4th prince had everyone get their cutlery first and then line up again to receive the food.

Despite that, all of them had to swallow their saliva and hold back their stomachs which were growling. Given Insane Fist's

example, they all stood quietly, waiting patiently for the food.

The barrels were filled with hot wheat porridge. To Van'er's surprise, he found that the porridge even contained jerky! While it was only a small piece of jerky, even then it was still meat! After he got his share of the porridge, he also got his wish – his egg.

Van'er almost wolfed down his food. It looked like he hadn't eaten for days, as he licked the bottom of his bowl again and again after finishing his food. He didn't even have the time to bite the egg, as he swallowed it whole, directly sending it into his stomach. Since he ate too fast and wasn't careful, his tongue developed blisters.

After putting the empty bowl down, Van'er patted his belly and happily belched. He hadn't enjoyed such a delicious meal in a long time. And even more incredible was that he actually felt a sense of satiety. Eating wheat porridge with black bread, even if compared to Heaven, it couldn't be better. If he could eat like this every day, even fighting in the front lines against the demonic beasts would be worth it, right?

After dinner, they all got a long period of time to rest. During this time everyone was brought back within the city walls, walking all the way to the camp of the town's patrol. A burly man with the rank of a Ranger came out and began to teach them how to set up tents.

Van'er knew him – there was no one in town who did not know Iron Axe. His superb skill in archery left even the town's most experienced hunter thinking that it was at the acme of perfection.

Wait a minute, since when did Iron Axe work for the 4th prince? It seemed that he had seen him staying at the side of the knights before. Van'er frowned. In the end, what was His Royal Highness planning? He was a former citizen of the Sand Nation.

“Do you really intend to appoint a man of the Sand Nation as captain?” Carter was holding this same question, “He does not belong to Graycastle. He is not even a person from our continent.”

“Witches also do not belong to Graycastle,” Roland disagreed, “but they all belong to Border Town. Besides, don't you see what's happening?”

“But, Your Highness...”

“Do not worry,” Roland patted the knight's shoulder, “In Border Town, we do not care about the origin of any person. As long as there is no violation of the law of the Kingdom, they will all be my beloved subjects. You really don't have to worry. You can also pick two captains. Anyway, in the future, we will expand the number of teams, so it would not be bad to cultivate some promising talents now. Oh, that's right! I have already written down the training regulations. Compared to the people of the Sand Nation, I think you should be more concerned about this.”

Carter took the parchment from Roland's hands. Sweeping through its contents from the beginning to the end, he suddenly felt dizzy. The training content was simply unheard of – for example, in the afternoon everyone had to run laps around Border Town after eating lunch until the sun set. The regulations even emphasized that everyone had to do this and that they were

allowed to help each other on the way. If they persevered without giving up until the end, they would all get an additional egg for dinner. Another example was when at night the wolf whistles were blown, everyone had to report immediately. With these kinds of training exercises, he was afraid that most of them would toss from one side to the other side during the night.

If the first few exercises were already hard to understand, then the last one, left Carter feeling thoroughly confused.

“Every day after dinner, they all have to go to Mr. Karl’s college to receive cultural training.”

“Your Highness... What is the meaning of cultural training? Do they have to learn how to read and write?”

“I would hope so, but the time is too short. Karl can only teach them a few simple words and numbers. This part, I will personally explain to Karl. You just need to send them over.”

“But, why do you want to do this? Learning how to read and write will not be helpful for fighting the demonic beasts!”

“Who said that?” Roland had to yawn, “A good unit must also be well educated. This is a lesson learnt from history.”

Chapter 27 - A Friendly Banter

Every day the weather was getting colder and colder, and every day Roland woke up later and later.

As a member of the ruling class, he certainly had the right to lie longer in bed, until late morning. In particular, every time he slept on his three-velvet cushion blanket bed, he felt like he was falling into soft clouds. Dawdling in this kind of a feeling could help him to boost his mood.

After Roland washed his face and rinsed his mouth he stepped into his office, where Nightingale had already been waiting for him for a long time.

“Well, here is your breakfast. I already ate half of it while it was still hot. But now, it’s cold.” said Nightingale as she pouted and pointed toward the table on which less than half of the bread was left. Looking at this scene, it seemed as if she was the owner of this place and not Roland.

“Did no one teach you to be humble in the presence of a prince?” Roland reached over to take the plates as he sat down at his desk, “I still remember that in the beginning you took etiquette quite seriously.”

He sighed within his heart. He really had not thought that Nightingale would always be around him instead of accompanying Anna. It seemed as if she wasn’t on a mission but taking a stroll in the sun instead. Before, she had always hid her figure. But now, as

long as there were no outsiders around she would openly show herself in the office without even wearing her hood.

“Like this?” She jumped off the table and gave a perfect noble bow, “Recently you’ve started to get up late. So, I thought eating your breakfast would help you solve this little problem, Your Highness.” she leaned herself towards Roland,”Anyway, you don’t care, right? I can see that you do not like these tedious rituals. “

Her remark was spot on. Roland silently cursed her. Was there anything she didn’t see?

He sighed, “Take the breakfast with you. After you begin to eat something, you have to finish it. I’ll get another one if I want to eat.”

“As you say, Your Highness!” She gently smiled and went to put the plate at her side.

Roland rolled out a blank parchment, and began to finish the complement design he had drawn partway.

If he wanted to hold Border Town, it wouldn’t be that easy after having a tragic victory in their first fight, so he had to do something. On top of that, his new troops had never seen blood. So Roland was worried that once large losses occurred, his newly trained troops wouldn’t be able to bring up the courage to stand on the walls.

He needed the weapons of his era to gain an absolute advantage over the demonic beasts.

Without a doubt, guns would help.

In fact, this era had all the conditions for guns to appear. Alchemists often created a powder, which was called 'snow powder', and was used for court celebrations. But this snow powder had the wrong recipe to be used as gunpowder, it was slow-burning and its explosion was more exaggerated than the damage it did.

In the next one hundred years, the prototype of guns – usable for war, will probably appear. Such firearms, because of their complicated operation, would require the collaboration of two people to shoot. Under normal circumstances they were only used as a single-shot weapon. But in terms of rate of fire and power, they were still not comparable with those of a well-trained archer.

Roland was certainly not interested in a repeat of history.

With the help of the steam engine and the ability of the witches, he could create guns which had real value.

“I saw the purchasing order on the table when you were asleep”, Nightingale swallowed the last piece of bread, and then casually asked, “What do you plan to do with so much ice? It’s winter. If you want to drink frozen ale you only need to put it outside the house, so why would you buy extra ice? “

The upper nobility liked to use ice in the summer – they used it together with saltpeter to enjoy cooled milk, fruit juice, or wine. Since now was the time of the cold season, the price for the acquisition of saltpeter was very low.

“To make iced cheese, the current temperature isn’t low enough,” answered Roland.

Although the woman in front of him wasn’t an enemy, he could not tell her everything like he did to Anna. The steam engine was something different, but things like firearms didn’t require such a high level of technological understanding. Once spread out, their distribution could no longer be controlled. As long as he didn’t know what kind of a person she was, it would be better to keep some things a secret from her. When he thought till here, he said imploringly to Nightingale, “Does the Witch Cooperation Association not only search for the Holy Mountain but also train witches as assassins?”

“No, they just swarm together in order to find the cure to end their pitiful life,” Nightingale waved her hand dismissively, “I joined the Witch Cooperation Association, but that was only two years ago.”

“In other words, you were working for someone else before?” Her excellent knife throwing skills were a product of years of hard training and good instruction, so Roland could confirm that, “So apart from me, there are also other people who are willing to shelter witches?”

“Shelter?” Nightingale’s face became a little strange, “How

could... If he had known that I was a witch, he wouldn't even let me through his door. I'm afraid he would have killed me in secret if I had stayed with him after exposing it to him."

"Oh? Can you tell me more?"

Nightingale smiled and shook her head, but this time the smile contained many unknown emotions, "Your Highness, you have to wait until the time is right before I tell you. I know what you are anxious about, but please rest assured. Five years ago I got my freedom, and now I no longer need to work for anyone else. "

His verification test failed, it seemed that his charm points were not high enough, ah... But her answers confirmed at least one of his presumptions – at least five years ago, she was a person who was involved in some shady business. Fortunately, it seemed that teaching and using Nightingale was apparently a coincidence, and her former employer was not like himself, who intended to employ a large number of witches.

Roland did not pursue this point any further as he bent over his drawing to finish it instead.

After some time he was a little bit surprised that the usually talkative Nightingale had now become quiet, and the only sound in the room was that of the fire burning. By the time Roland raised his head to stretch his sore neck, he could not detect any sign of her in the office.

"To walk out without saying anything?," he muttered, as he

folded the parchment in his hands and put it into his personal pocket.

The next days he was busy with drawing the weapons designs or testing the already finished designs.

His intention was to make the famous flintlock firearm. This kind of weapon was already tested through history; the difficulty was to make a gun similar to an arquebus. First the gunpowder had to be inserted and then the lead ball was to be loaded. The firing rate was close to three rounds per minute, so it really didn't require much skill in order to deal with the demonic beasts.

Most of the demonic beasts couldn't climb the walls, so the shooting distance was approximately equal to the height of the walls, which was twelve feet. At this distance, even with a bad aim it should be possible to hit the beasts, and the lead ball would also not lose much of its power. If only the skin of the demonic beasts evolved to be as hard as steel, then they could be easily shot and killed.

The disadvantage laid in the production time of a flintlock. It started with the matchlock; the smith had to slowly hammer it into form from the barrel to the trigger. The entire production of a gun would take about three months, wherein the barrel needed the largest part of it. First it had to be beaten into a thin and cylindrical shape, and then the spiral grooves could be engraved. Although without the right equipment it was quite sophisticated, but it should still be possible for a well-learned blacksmith to make a good barrel.

This was also one of the reason that Roland created the steam engine first.

With the steam engine, he could use a steel drill to bore the drill directly into the solid iron, so with this the production speed could significantly be increased. He didn't need a master blacksmith to do the work, he only needed one table on which he could affix the barrel.

Chapter 28 - Fierce Scar

When Roland tried to change the theory into practice, he discovered that it wasn't as easy as he imagined.

In the backyard after four or five days, the production of a harder drill was successful. It was easily quiet since he could use the high-temperature flame from Anna, which could easily get above 1500 degrees, and was enough to melt iron. Without needing to think about temperature control, and using the conventional method of producing steel, it was easy and quickly possible to make a small quantity of steel bars – namely the high-speed stirring of iron clubs with molten iron. The excess carbon and other impurities in the pig iron would oxidize when coming into contact with the air. By repeating this several times before letting the molten iron cool down, it was possible to get high-quality steel.

The problem laid within the steam engine.

The worked up noise and vibration by his prototype of the steam engine was very impressive, even when stabilizing the drill it was impossible to complete a pipe. When doing heavy work or menial jobs, this degree of tremor didn't matter, but processing a gun barrel was clearly not possible.

If he wanted to improve the steam engine, he would have to create a centrifugal mechanics governor to control the output power of the steam engine, and then he could reduce the tremor by using gears to adjust the rotation speed of the drill. And he need a simple lathe machining gear. With all this in mind, Roland simply found no way to achieve this goal while preparing for the coming

Months of the Demons.

In the end, he could only use the old fashioned way, and let a blacksmith hammer the drill into the barrel. But the plan to mass-produce firearms was impossible. According to the number of smithies in Border Town, it was only possible to produce 3-4 root barrels each month, but only in the case that he stopped the production of the second steam engine.

The only good news was that didn't have to worry about the quality of the barrels. The blacksmith only had to knock out a rough pipe, and then Anna could do the unifying commissure, her work was seamless and so good that it basically eliminated the risk of a barrel explosion.

So Roland had no choice but to change his former plan. He had intended to recruit hunters from Border Town, who would then form a rifle team – most of them were proficient in archery with either a bow or crossbow, both were handy weapons. In addition, they only need a short amount of time to train with the firearms, so they could be quickly sent into combat.

But now with only four guns produced before the Months of the Demons, he could only pick the most outstanding hunters and had no manpower to build up an elite group. Roland decided to let Iron Axe handle this matter, he already spent fifteen years in Border Town, so he should know who the best hunters are.

For the last month, Brian was unhappy.

Especially when he met the militia in the street, his unsatisfied feeling would be doubled... He even felt a trace of loathing.

He felt His Highness had forgotten him.

A month ago when he was called by the chief knight, he was full of excitement. He would have close contact with the 4th Prince, and get orders directly from His Royal Highness, how fortunate and glorious would that be!

He grew up in Border Town, and although he born from a common hunting family, by virtue of his ability he was able to get a place as town patrol.

He knew he could not rely on his family background to become a knight, but instead could only wait for the opportunity to get enough merits to receive the honor of becoming a knight.

His Highness asked him what he knew about the demonic beasts, so he was apparently unwilling to give up his own territory during the winter. He was trying to find ways to fight the demonic beasts. Later the wantonly built walls also proved that there was no doubt that this year they would spend the Months of the Demons in Border Town.

If he wanted to stop the invasion of the demonic beasts here, we would have to set up a front-fighting team. Brian thought that he himself was a good candidate, he was proficient in investigating, fencing, and riding, and in the last year he was even the last person

in Border Town who ignited the flames, proving that he did not lack courage, but he had never expected that His Highness intended to elect a team from the civilian population to fight against the demonic beasts!

Yes, a purely civilian team, and not just him, but the entire patrol team of ten people were not accepted during the review by the chief knight. This was simply incredible, did His Highness think that these people, who had never held a sword, would be better at fighting than his own town patrol? He was afraid that when they got to see the evil beast's fierce appearance they would instantly collapse!

But His Highness seemed to be serious... He not only trained the mob, but even gave them a uniform and many other clothes. Every afternoon Brian could see this group of people dressed up in a brown and gray leather armor, they were arranged in two columns running down the street. In the beginning, they were lacking any order, but recently they had become neater and neater.

While he himself still had to perform his boring task every day, he couldn't see any possibility of promotion now.

When he was tossing and turning at night, he could hear a sound at his door, then the door opened and someone came in quietly.

"Hey, we are up," whispered a person in a low voice. Brian could tell to whom this voice belonged, it belonged to a member of his own patrol, nicknamed Fierce Scar.

In his room slept five people. In addition to himself and Greyhound, the other three quickly stood up, and they seemed well prepared, they hadn't even taken off their coats.

“Captain, get up, I have something important to tell you.”

In Longsong Stronghold Fierce Scar had a noble relative, who had not heard of his great noble uncle? So thanks to this he had a high status within the team. It was not good for Brian to ignore him, so he had to climb up and ask, “What happened?”

Greyhound also woke up, “This is... it's so late, why don't you sleep... aren't you sleepy?”

“I have the greatest job in your lives to introduce to you, you want to be canonized as a knight, right?”

“What...What? Knight?” Greyhound was surprised.

Brian heart jump wildly and he quickly asked, “In the end what is the job?”

“You all know my Uncle Hillererer, he isn't only the herald of Duke Ryan, even more, he is one of his confidants. This is news he himself personally confessed to me,” Fierce Scar spoke with a low voice, “The 4th Prince preparing to shake off the shackles from Longsong Stronghold made Duke Ryan very unhappy. He has decided to let the prince know who the true owner of the western border is. “

“Difficult, difficult, don’t... your plan... assassination...” Greyhound was so nervous he even began to stammer, and he didn’t even speak a complete sentence.

“How would that be possible,” Fierce Scar laughed maniacally, “After all, he is a Prince, if we kill him, not even Duke Ryan could shelter us. I said this is your biggest chance in your life.”

Brain felt subconsciously that the deal was certainly not as simple as he claimed it to be, but the temptation to be canonized as a knight was too great, he could not help himself and opened his mouth, “Begin to talk, we are listening.”

“Food! If he has no food, he can only humble himself and go back to Longsong Stronghold where Duke Ryan already promised him a place. As long as we can successfully burn the food, which the 4th Prince had previously bought, Duke Ryan will organize the canonization ceremony for us, and will give each of us fiefdom east of Longsong Stronghold. This is a golden opportunity, Captain, what do you think? “

“Y-you are crazy... now, hadn’t His Royal Highness’ astrologer said that this year... Months of the Demons would likely hold on for more than four months... if we set the food on fire, if we burn it all, what would we eat!?” Greyhound again and again shook his head, “two... two years ago, there was a great famine, has everyone forgotten it?”

“What does it have to do with us?” asked another person

disdainfully, “Anyway, I do not intend to stay here, if we do the job for Duke Ryan, we can live a comfortable life in the stronghold.”

“Yes, do you want to eat this hell of slag for a lifetime, do you?” Other people begun to chime in.

Hell, they already colluded at an earlier time. Brian’s heart became cold, and in addition, except Greyhound most of them were from outside of Border Town, they came from all over the kingdom and they don’t have any nostalgia with this town. Feeling powerless to stop them, Brian had to change the subject, “But the purchased wheat was transferred to His Royal Highness’ castle, and all the doors are guarded by His Highness’ knights, how could you go through with your plan?”

“That’s why I need your help,” Fierce Scar smiled proudly, “From an early age you have stayed in this broken place, so no one is more familiar with the environment here than you. I remember that you once said that there is a ravine in an abandoned well, and its end is connected with the castle’s water supply. Through it, we can silently enter the castle garden. Didn’t you find it when you were still a child? How is it? With this easy task, you can become a knight in the future – a knight personally canonized by Duke Ryan.”

A knight... should not do any injustice, instead, he should have the courage to fight against it, and he should not be afraid of any danger, and should always be ready to protect the weak! For Duke Ryan’s personal gains, the residents of his hometown would face the threat of hunger and death? Becoming a knight like this, there was no glory at all!

He refused to open his mouth, but Greyhound began to shout.

“You are a group of maniacs! You... you’re... actually thinking about the idea of burning the food! I would never! Never let you leave this place! I will report it, report to... ahh,” Greyhound only spoke until here, his voice suddenly became weaker, with an incredible look he turned around, looking at a former teammate standing behind him and sneering at him. A black dagger was insert in Greyhound’s waist; the dagger was totally inserted into the body. Greyhound shivered twice, he opened his mouth and tried to say something, but he could only emit a hoarse breathing sound.

The other guard stirred his dagger twice, and then he abruptly withdrew it. Greyhound, like a doll who suddenly lost its support, softly crumbled to the ground.

“How?” Fierce Scar was suddenly so close to Brian, that the latter could even feel the foul breath exhaled from his mouth, “I think you have made a decision, right, Captain Brian?”

Chapter 29 - Fury

The Castle in Border Town hadn't always stood in the place it stood now.

When they laid the foundation for the first castle, the ground collapsed due to an underground cave. Because of this, the Castle position had been moved.

The already excavated sewers were mostly destroyed in the collapse, and some parts were still intact, but these parts were also discarded because of the relocation and redevelopment of the castle.

When Brian was still young, he often played in these underground tunnels, and one day he accidentally found a route from an abandoned well outside the castle wall that directly lead to a well in the castle garden. Brian told the news of this discovery to his father, but he got a severely beating in return. His father also warned him that trespassing into the lord's castle was a capital offense, in the case that he was found it could only end with a journey to the gallows.

Through this Brian was frightened for his life and never went into the old sewers again. However, when people get together they will start to drink and chat, and during such occasions he had repeatedly boasted about his own ability to have direct access to the castle. Now he was extremely regretting it.

The entire town's patrol apart from Greyhound were nine men.

In other words, Fierce Scar had convinced the entire town's patrol – and they were now working for Duke Ryan, who was in control of the western part of the kingdom. Furthermore, the rewards were so good, that presumably only very few people could withstand this temptation.

The abandoned well was in the part of the place which collapsed in the beginning, and it was still a wasteland even today. Fierce Scar ordered Brian with his sword to lead the way, and during the whole time on their way to the well Brian was caught in the middle of the group. The fairly spacious waterways he could remember from his childhood had now become very narrow. Because nobody went through this way, the water diversion had dug many holes in which have grown many vines.

The guy who stabbed Greyhound was leading the way at the forefront and holding a torch, in the other hand he held a hatchet to clear the way of all obstacles.

While Brian pretended to recall the road, in the bottom of his heart, he secretly thought on a way to escape.

But for such actions this was clearly a very inconvenient place, here he had no possibility of escaping. Only in the castle, there was the possible to obtain a slim chance. But how should he do it? Should he cry out loud to lead His Highness' guards to them? No... no that was a bad idea, Fierce Scar only had to raise his hand and he would be able to take Brian's own life, he had to get away from him, otherwise his fate would be like that of Greyhound.

When thinking about Greyhound, Brian's eyes became somewhat

gloomy.

Before Border Town had been established, he and Brian himself were already living here. They grew up and played many times together, and even joined the town's patrol together, which was Brian's idea. Greyhound had never expected that he himself would be elected as captain of the patrol.

Brian had been happy for him for a long time, but because of his stuttering, Greyhound had suffered much contempt. But today, he finally had the chance to be recognized – at last an opportunity arrived, thought Brian.

But when Greyhound went down and Fierce Scar snarled towards Brian, Fierce Scar sarcastically told him directly to his face the true reason why everyone elected Greyhound as captain.

“Fool, he was elected because an important job of the captain is to stay behind during the Months of the Demons and take care of things, like igniting the flames to ring the alarm.

We let you do this, because why should I do such a dangerous task? “

This sentence was like a sharp knife, directly stabbing into Brian's ear.

So those who modestly declined when they got the offer for promotion... Those congratulations words were so false, their true

reason was so ugly. He showed a look of shock and despair across his face, to cover up the raging anger within his heart. This was simply inexcusable, Brian secretly raged, someone must pay the price for this!

After walking for half an hour through the dried sewer, the crowd finally could hear the sound of flowing water.

This meant that they weren't far away from their destination.

After they turned around a corner, the front was suddenly a lot more open and bright, the open place could accommodate two people standing side by side. The person moving in front of the group said, "There is no road ahead, it's the mouth of the shaft."

"What now?" asked Fierce Scar while poking Brain with the sword.

"Tell him to look up," Brian narrated, "We have finally arrived."

This abandoned channel was just in the middle of the castle sewer. At the time of the repairs, maybe due to negligence, they didn't seal this interface. Fierce Scar stuck close to the wall and took a probing look, at his feet the rushing water was three feet deep, and when he looked upwards he was able to see the night sky through a small hole.

He let the other people to look at Brian, and he took his backpack and pulled out a bundle of rope, fastened a hook to it and gently

tossed it up, only to hear the sound of the hook firmly sticking to edge of the wellhead.

Fierce scar followed the rope, cautiously climbing out. Soon, he tugged at the rope from above and the other people schematically went up.

After a long wait, it was finally Brian's turn to climb up the well. Originally they could only see the caste far into the distance but now stood right in front of them.

Fierce Scar grabbed Brian and ordered silently, "You're coming with us to the warehouse."

Brian had only been here once. Although in his memory the look of the castle had become blurred, he still knew where they were, if they forced open the nearest door to the well, they would directly enter the castle.

At this time most of the people in the castle had already gone to sleep, and the oil lamp hanging at the wall of the corridor had already been extinguished, too. In the darkness, someone had to light a fire. The weak fire illuminated only a radius of a few feet, but Brian was waiting for his chance, which would certainly come.

When the team came to a fork in the road leading to the basement, he aimed for the stairway leading downwards, and suddenly rushed past his guards. The guards at Brian's side were caught off guard, despite paying attention to every movement he did, Brian just jumped too fast, so they had not a chance to

respond, but soon they reacted and jumped down after him.

He fell down the stairs, out of the range of the light and disappeared into the darkness.

“Oh shit, damn it!” Fierce scar immediately pulled out his dagger and jumped down to to catch up. He thought that Brian would take advantage of the darkness and would play hide and seek with him, so he was caught off-guard when Brian didn’t escape. He instead stood patiently at the end of the stairs as if he was waiting for him.

Fierce Scar noted that his other accomplices were already lying motionless on the ground, and in Brian’s hands were the men’s weapon.

“Idiot, do you think you have a chance of winning against me?” Fierce Scar took on an alert posture, and he could also hear his other men coming down the steps, “We have seven people, and you are alone.”

Brian did not answer; it was already needless to constrain his own fury any longer. He brought up his sword and quickly slashed diagonally downwards, hitting Fierce Scar’s sword, instantly creating sparks. Before Fierce Scar could even take his next defense posture, Brian’s sword tip had already pierced his shoulder!

Fierce Scar gave off a pained roar, and took a step back to let another man step forward, blocking Brian’s pursuit.

This was an excellent place for Brian to fight, with narrow aisles his opponents could simply not take advantage of their superior numbers. He just stood in the center of the corridor and had only the enemies in front of him. He would be able to hold off two people, who had to fight with there swords side by side.

In fencing, Brian would not lose confidence against anyone in the patrol.

When these group of lazy scumbags were gambling and indulging in a bar, he was still honing his combat skills, regardless of wind, frost, rain, and snow, unbroken through the whole years – this was his choice and the reason why he didn't shout for help immediately.

He wanted to personally avenge Greyhound.

Chapter 30 - Out Of The Fog

The substitute for Fierce Scar came forward to merely receive two fast attacks from Brian before getting his sword swept away.

They were not much of a town patrol, it would be more correct to call them a group of bullies. Thinking this fueled Brian's anger even more. In addition to extortion and blackmail, what else did these people do? Greyhound and Brian had carried out the tasks given by the lord without any loose threads, but the ranks beneath them were a completely different category.

But..... it was this group of trash, who would be the group taking refuge in the stronghold. This scum, the scourge of the two who even dared to kill Greyhound by employing an extremely despicable method.

This was unforgivable!

His sword slashed towards his frightened opponent and cut his neck off – but just in this moment, a shadow which stuck behind his former target's back attacked Brian's heart in the blink of an eye. The blow was too subtle, so when Brian noticed it, it was already too late to parry.

In a desperate act, he violently threw himself backwards to the ground, and at the same time while he was falling backwards, he felt a stabbing pain in his chest region.

After two rolls backwards, he immediately stood up again and

took a defensive posture. Brian was lucky that the sneak attack just now had only pierced his coat and skin, and didn't cause any heavy injury. The key was to stab at a man's weak point with the sword! From the impression he had of his own patrol members, he was sure that none of them had fencing skills.

"Huh? You actually escaped," the man kicked the lost weapons of his dead teammates away, and step by step came forward towards Brian.

What the hell? Brian found himself unable to recognize the other one – he was not a tall man, but his hands were too big in comparison to his body, when his arms were hanging down from his sides his hands almost reached his knees, his eyes were so strange; Brian could swear that he had never seen this pair of eyes.

"You are not a member of the town patrol... Who the hell are you?"

Although five of the ten members from the town patrol were living next door and he rarely dealt with them, he could still always recognize these people. So this guy obviously replaced one of them and followed the team on their way into the castle. The fact that he didn't previously see him on their way into the castle was not surprising, after all, the night was pitch-black. However, there was no reaction from the group of Fierce Scar. Since they regarded him without surprise, there was only one possibility, this guy was previously arranged for by Fierce Scar.

"You can guess the answer. Why do you need to ask me?" he replied while smiling indifferently, "Anyway, you are going to die

soon.”

“Damn, he hurt me!” Fierce Scar bitterly flamed, “Viper, quickly chop off his hands and feet, I want to slowly bathe in his blood!”

“Unfortunately, Mr. Hill, I must give priority to the completion of the task given to me by my Lord.”

Just like his name, this guy was really the incarnation of a serpent. He would always attack from a strange and tricky angle, in addition to his extremely long arm span. He directly forced Brian into a bitter struggle. Brian was forced back again and again, and he could never find an opportunity to counter attack.

He was just too careless! In his heart, Brian could feel some anxiety welling up. He had already fought so long in this underground walkway, so the guards above should have already noticed the fight, right?

He had originally intended to personally avenge Greyhound, but now he could only hope to live a little bit longer, waiting for the Knight Guards of His Highness to come break the siege of these villains.

“You seem to be waiting for something.” Viper suddenly suspended his attacks, “I guess you’re waiting for the prince’s knights to come rescue you? Unfortunately, this stone castle is differently built from the common pubs and brothels. It’s only a matter of time before those wooden shacks break down. But this door here, even if you tear out your throat while shouting, the

people behind would never hear any sound. “

When Brain heard the reason, he could not help himself and hesitated for a moment. This was exactly the opportunity Viper had been waiting for. He slashed with his sword downwards, pressing Brian's sword down, and paralyzing him in his movements, then he slightly raised his other hand and triggered the hidden hand crossbow in his sleeve.

A one-finger long bolt shot from the cuff, and when Brian heard the humming sound of the mechanism, the bolt had already pierced into his lungs.

Suddenly an unbearable pain exploded within his chest. Brian threw his sword in Viper's direction and then turned back and ran. However, his pulmonary blood was seeping quickly into his trachea and made it difficult for him to breathe. He really couldn't run far. He tripped over a threshold, took some staggering steps and fell heavily to the ground.

Viper soon caught up, he wanted to end this fight quickly, but was held back by Fierce Scar.

“Let me do it,” hissed Fierce Scar through his gritted teeth, “I want to kill this guy! After all, he stabbed me!”

A cold look flashed through Viper's eyes, but in the end, he still stepped aside, “But do it fast, and do not forget that we still have other business down here.”

Fierce Scar grabbed Brian's hair and growled at him, "Believe me, you will die slowly and very painfully."

Brian wanted to spit into Fierce Scar's face, but his body strength flowed away like water into a bottomless hole. He did not know how much longer he could live on. The regrets of his life came into his mind, such as not yet meeting his wife and not fulfilling his dream to become a knight. But what he regretted the most was... that he didn't avenge Greyhound.

Wait, what was that?

He blinked once and suddenly there was a woman sitting on the lid of a box, although within this dark light, he couldn't see her appearance clearly, but with such an exquisite body there was no doubt that she was a woman.

Hell, was this an illusion?... it has to be. He fell into this room at midnight, and there was definitely not anyone inside! Could it be that God in heaven had heard his complaints and specially made this fantasy to comfort him?

"Hey, you're playing so lively in someone else's place and even intend to kill someone in front of my face. I'm afraid this isn't appropriate right?"

Fierce Scar saw something flickering at the edge of his view, so he abruptly let go of Brian's hair. He took his sword out of its scabbard and turned to her while hearing that several other members of his team were doing the same, "Who are you!?"

Why would they too respond to her... Wait, with his dim consciousness Brian begun to think, what if when what he was seeing wasn't an illusion?

“Of course, I'm here,” the woman jumped from the box, bent over and patted the dust off her gown. In the dim firelight, Brian could see strange patterns embroidered on her robe – three juxtaposed triangles, and set in the center was a huge eye. The contour of the eye, when illuminated by the fire seemed a bit golden.

“Why are you here? Sneaking through the sewers like rats.” Her voice was clear and sweet but her face showed no emotions. This was an anomaly anyone seeing such a murder scene shouldn't be so calm.

Viper was aware of this point. He looked solemn as he slowly turned around to face the new opponent and suddenly attacked with a piercing strike.

The woman didn't look concerned as she casually waved her hand. But Viper didn't even see her arms moving, he only felt a cold wind blowing through his body.

Seeing such an unbelievable sight, Fierce Scar could only stare in disbelief. He rushed forward to help Viper, but he could see that he came too late for Viper because the place where his arm normally was, was already empty.

Along with his falling arm and sword, Viper dropped to the ground.

Seeing this, Fierce Scar was overwhelmed by fright and could feel a strangling pressure in his throat. Others did not know, but he knew very well the ins and outs of Viper. “Vicious, cunning and very dangerous.” This was his uncle’s evaluation of Viper. He could recruit other people, he held absolute strength, and should never be underestimated, it was even difficult for Brian to hold off Viper’s attacks for half a quarter of an hour. But now, he had been casually blown away by a woman, and even got his whole arm cut off.

“Everyone don’t stupidly stand around! Go and kill her!” shouted Viper while pressing on his wounds.

Due to his excessive bleeding, Brian’s vision began to blur. He could only hear chaotic footsteps, sounds from weapons clashing, as well as the sound of bodies hitting the ground everywhere around him. Then... everything became muffled. In the end, what happened? He tried to turn his head, and looked in the direction of the fight – what he saw then was a picture which was too difficult to understand.

The woman was just like a ghost, walking in and out of the crowd however she wanted, vanishing out of sight again and again. Every one of her attacks would penetrate the enemy’s vitals. It wasn’t possible to call it a fight, it would be better to say she was dancing. He had never seen anyone able to wield murderous weapons while having such a sense of rhythm, slaying high and low, drawing an inconceivable path. In contrast, the people around her were

nothing more than a group of clumsy clowns. They tried to fight back, only to fall in vain. In the end, only she was left standing, proud and independent.

That was the last scene he saw before he lost his consciousness.

Chapter 31 - “Our Friend”

Roland was sitting at his desk in a dazed state. He actually didn't expect that someone was trying to commit murder in his castle. He was afraid that if Nightingale hadn't promptly discovered them, they would have murdered him in cold blood.

Who ordered this assassination attempt? Was it his third sister, or one of his other siblings? Why were they doing this? It was a five-year struggle for the throne, but in the past few months they had already tried to kill him twice. Roland, full of irritation, banged his desk. This was simply outrageous! Couldn't they just let him face the Months of the Demons?

Footsteps could be heard from outside of the door. It was Carter, his chief knight. After he pushed open the door he said, “Your Highness, the identities of the deceased have been identified. From the eight bodies, seven were original members of the patrol, but the last one is still unidentified. In addition, there are two who are still alive and under the care of the witch... if not... After being treated by Miss Payne, they have yet to wake up. Also the path to the sewers is being closely guarded now.”

They were from the town patrol? He knew that the team raised by the former Lord wasn't reliable. Roland gritted his teeth, actually, eight from the ten people were disloyal, so not letting them join the militia was really the right choice.

“That is good, and also make sure they are always well-guarded, don't let them commit suicide like the last time!”

“Like...The last time?”

“Oh, nothing.” Roland shook his head. Apparently due to Nightingale’s early wake up call, his head was still confused. “Anyway, I want to know everything about them. Who is their leader? Who is their contact person? Who is their investor? You must investigate all of this and more...”

“Yes, Your Highness.” Carter had gotten his orders, but he did not leave immediately, instead he went down on one knee and said, “That the assassins could sneak into the castle was my dereliction of duty. I hope Your Highness will punish me.”

“Enough is enough. At that time, you weren’t even in the castle, so this has nothing to do with you.”

“Well” Carter hesitated, “Can you tell me who it was in the end that prevented this assassination attempt? I could see from the scene, that they...” the knight had to swallow, “all of them seem to be have been killed by the same person and were totally defenseless.”

“That you can tell?” Roland was curious.

“If they were evenly matched, the scene wouldn’t be so clean and the wounds would be in a wide range all over the bodies,” Carter whispered, “Everybody was killed down in the small warehouse, in addition to blood and dead bodies there was nothing else on the ground. There was almost no damage to the goods placed down there. Those big boxes which store bacon didn’t even have a sword

cut. That shows that the man didn't need to use any cover, it seems as if he was taking a walk in a small clearing. With all due respect, Your Highness, this is just too incredible. ”

“So that's the reason,” Roland nodded his head, he understood the meaning of Carter's explanation. After a theoretically strong person was surrounded, he would fall into an extreme adverse situation – real fights usually didn't end like what was shown in movies, where the surrounded person sends one enemy after the other towards the ground. An attack from a blind spot would be particularly deadly. So to fight many, the correct approach would be to rely on the terrain and the environment so that they could always face the opposition.

But Nightingale was not one of those ordinary people.

“No matter what you do, you have to complete the mission I gave you, first. This person cannot be revealed yet, but when the time comes, I'll tell you.”

Although he knew that the chief knight was one of his loyal and reliable subordinates and that he also knew that Nana and Anna were witches, but Roland still chose to hide the presence of Nightingale from him, because the difference between her and the other two witches was that she didn't belong to their side. She only stayed in Border Town because of Anna. She belonged to the Witch Association Cooperation, and would sooner or later leave this town.

Carter gave a salute and retired.

Roland could understand his thoughts. As a person well versed with the sword, Carter constantly practiced a training program that was produced from summarizing and accumulating fighting techniques for hundreds of years, and in truth they were proud of their heritages. But when he saw the scene in the warehouse, he couldn't believe it and began to have doubts – if sword play could be perfected to such a state, of which heritage were they normally so proud of?

“I thought you would tell me to come out,” Nightingale revealed herself. She was still sitting on the corner of his desk, with crossed legs.

“I also thought about it. How about it? You can just settle down here as my hidden sword. You will get two gold royals as monthly salary, the double of what Anna gets. What do you think?” Roland began to advise it further “You will get a house with a garden, two days off each week, and even paid leave every year – uh, that's it, the rest would only be a monetary reward.”

To his surprise, Nightingale didn't flatly refuse him. She only smiled and said neither yes or no, “I cannot abandon my companions, no matter what.”

“That would be now, but when the winter is over, Border Town will begin a time of reconstruction. And at that time, how many people will still care about it. And then... the witches will no longer have to suffer discrimination while walking in the streets. No one will see you as the devil's spokesperson.”

“And so on... You are always talking about it,” said Nightingale indifferently.

It was time to stop. It was always better to see than to hear. This kind of thing could only be changed slowly. Roland changed the subject, “Nana has been safely sent back, right?”

“Ah yes, but she got spooked.”

Roland sighed, it couldn't be helped, after all, it was midnight when she had been woken up by Nightingale. When she was brought to the scene and saw the battle place, she almost threw up. Nightingale gave him a short account about the things which happened, and then he told her to get Nana. Usually, Nana had to only heal chickens. But now, when the little girl saw people covered in blood, she immediately fainted. After a short while, she woke up and began to heal the person from the town patrol with her face full of tears.

In order to keep Nana's family in the dark, Nightingale was also responsible for taking her back.

When everything was settled, it was almost daybreak.

“How was the investigation? Could you figure out which of my good brothers or sisters sent them?”

Nightingale shook her head, “They were all people of your own patrol, with only one exception, but he also didn't carry any

identity-related evidence with him. With enough money, anyone could hire them. But I think that this perhaps isn't related to your siblings."

"Why?"

"Because it was extremely unorganized. During multiple occasions, the team actually had a lot infighting. And immediately after their failure they didn't commit suicide, leaving at least two people alive. And then, they had no professional performance. In general, they were just street punks. This is unlike the style of your brothers and sisters, it is more likely that it was a layman's plan. I think that even if I wasn't here there was no way their assassination attempt would have succeeded. Don't forget that Anna is sleeping downstairs. "

Nightingale reached for Roland's cup, she didn't seem to care about drinking from the same cup as him, and then said, "No matter what, your knight had asked for the truth of what happened in the sewers, and I bet he will soon know the truth – compared with the former piece of your sister, that guy is much less professional. If I hadn't left, he would still kneel before me begging me to not to kill him."

"That seriously injured patrol member, it seems that he is the one I summoned not too long ago."

"Really?" Nightingale tilted her head, "I think that you'll have to reward him. If he hadn't stood up against the other guys, I would not have found them so quickly and they would have slipped into the basement of the castle. Although it is still not clear why he did

that, but the enemy's enemy is our friend, right? ”

Yes, Roland thought, but the important part was not if he is a friend or foe, but rather that Nightingale said the two words.

– “Our friend.”

Chapter 32 - Knight

When Brian woke up, the first thing that caught his eyes was the white ceiling.

The sunlight shining through the window was somewhat bright, so he had to close his eyes a little. Then when his eyes got used to the sunlight, he opened them again, only to find the scene in front of him unchanged.

Feeling that it wasn't a dream, he thought, I'm... still alive? He tried to move his body, but soon noticed that he could only lift his fingers a little bit. It seemed that his whole body's strength was gone.

Then he heard someone shouting, "He woke up! Go and inform His Highness!"

His Highness? Brian felt like his brain was filled with paste and that his thought process was many times slower than usual. By the way, what happened after I fainted? I can only remember that Viper pierced my chest and that I was dying, and in my last moment I could see a ghostly woman who defeated all the enemies in an incredible way...

Soon a maid arrived to help him up so that he could sit in the bed. Then another maid came holding a basin and sat down next to him and immediately began to help him clean his face. In his whole life Brian had never experienced such comprehensive personal service, plus the maids were all young women, which

made the situation really awkward for him.

Fortunately, the situation did not last long. As soon as the 4th Prince entered the room, everyone else left.

Brian could feel a surging heat within his heart. He had too much to ask, but then, when he tried to open his mouth he didn't know from where to begin. But contrary to what he had expected, Roland nodded and said, "I already know of all your past achievements, and Brian, you are worthy of the title of a hero."

Hearing the word "Hero", Brian suddenly felt his eyes begin to tear up. He began to sob and his voice choked, "No... Your Highness, my friend...is the real ..."

Roland patted him on his shoulder so as to comfort him.

It was exactly like Nightingale had predicted. After Fierce Scar was dragged into the torture chamber, he began to tell everything he knew before the warden even put his hands on him.

The one behind this group was not his sister or any other of his siblings, but Longsong Stronghold's Elk family. Count Elk got in contact with his distant relative Hiller Dmitry. Afterwards, Fierce Scar gained control over most of the town patrol with the lure of a reward. In addition, he also sent an assassin to replace one of the members in the team to prevent an accident from occurring in the course of action. The purpose of this group of people was not to assassinate Roland like he had thought, instead they intended to burn the food reserves so that he would obediently go back to the

stronghold.

Their conspiracy resulted in the death of an innocent person – Greyhound. He tried to stop Fierce Scar when he heard of his criminal intent, but he was stabbed to death with a dagger by one of his own subordinates. The whereabouts of the patrol member who was replaced by Viper was unknown. When he didn't see fire on the castle ground and noticed that Fierce Scar failed to come back, he probably realized that the plan was discovered and fled..

To help stabilize Brian's mood, Roland promised him, "Your friend Greyhound, he'll get a funeral fitting for his sacrifice, and his family will be properly cared for, they will no longer need to worry about food in the future."

"Thank you, Your Highness," Brian took a deep breath, "I have to know. Fierce Scar... is he dead?"

"No, he is still alive."

Brian painfully closed his eyes. He would rather have had them not rescue Fierce Scar so that he would have been dragged to hell than both of them staying alive. But now, the chance to fulfill his wish became slim... There was no doubt that Fierce Scar was guilty, but the sins committed by nobility could always be redeemed with money. As long as his uncle was willing to protect him, it was very likely that Fierce Scar wouldn't die. It was most probable that he wouldn't even need to go to prison.

Roland could naturally guess his thoughts, "Hiller Dmitry, the

uncle of Fierce Scar, is also a distant relative of the Elk family in Longsong Stronghold. The head of the family is Luke Dmitry, a vassal under Duke Ryan, but the fact that he is the distant uncle of Fierce Scar..." here he paused for a little moment, "will not affect the final verdict. Fierce Scar has been sentenced to death by hanging, and there are only three days left until his execution. If you can restore your body by then, you're invited to witness it if you wish to. "

Brian became startled, "But... But Your Highness, members of the nobility can have their freedom bought, this rule you cannot offend -"

Roland waved his hand dismissively, indicating Brian shouldn't concern himself with it, "He is a Noble? Maybe for you, he was born in a branch family of the Elk family, so the status you and he have are as much apart as heaven and earth. However, it's a fact that he has neither a title nor any land, so he simply cannot be considered as nobleman. In addition, even if he were a nobleman, to lead an invasion into the prince's temporal royal residence and attempt to burn the food stocks, ignoring the fate of the two thousand people in Border Town, carried enough guilt. Adding these three sins together, he could simply not be forgiven."

At the time when Roland ordered the death of Tyre, he felt a little hesitant within his heart, but Fierce Scar belonged to the entirely inexcusable category. If he were successful, all of Roland's own future plans for Border Town would be destroyed, and he would never get a chance to turn his situation around. This was more hateful than a direct assassination attempt at Roland himself.

As for the possibility that his action would annoy Longsong Stronghold? Who cares! Since the other party did not want to cooperate with him, of course he would not compromise with them, they even tried choosing underhanded tactics to entrap the entire population of Border Town. At the same time this incident also taught Roland a lesson – this world’s political struggle was different than what he knew from his former world, there they would mostly concentrate themselves on competing under the table, but here they were more inclined to set the table aside and use a much bloodier method. “Rest well. You lost too much of your strength, so don’t leave the castle. I have arranged for other people to take over your patrol’s work, and at the end of the Months of the Demons, I’ll hold your canonization ceremony. “

“Your Highness,” after hearing the words ‘canonization ceremony’, Brian looked at the prince with disbelief, “You mean...”

“Yes, you will become one of my knights, Mr. Brian,” replied Roland with a smile.

“Prepare – stab!”

Van’er stabbed a wooden dummy with a pike, and on both sides his team members also did the same, with the same force and also from nearly the same angle.

This time, it was already his one-hundredth stab.

He only had a tingling feeling left in his arms and he already thought that he would never survive this training. Despite the fact that he began to have this thought after his fiftieth stab, he still endured. After one week of conditioning it was already his natural reflex to obey every given order. Honestly, he himself was the most surprised that he could still endure.

“All – rest!”

After Iron Axe shouted his command, Van’er could suddenly hear the sound of exhaling from everywhere around him. Van’er let also exhaled, and then he put down the pike as he sat on the ground.

Now, he finally realized that their own militia was not responsible for being the errand troop for the guards or the knights. After one week of eccentric training, the training changed more to the fighting portion. For example, now they were standing on the city wall and were thrusting out their pikes according to the captain’s orders – although these pikes were replaced with wooden poles, anyone could imagine their roles in the future.

The logistics team would never do such exercises, so this also meant that they would confront the evil beasts on the wall. Naturally thinking about this, Van’er felt fear. He had even thought of sneaking away, but he didn’t know why, seeing his teammates around himself with the thought of three meals a day and a good salary slowly changed his mind.

Chapter 33 - Gunpowder

Not even a quarter hour rest later, Iron Axe clapped his hands and shouted, “Everyone stand up, His Highness, the 4th Prince is coming.”

Van’er soon returned to his place, due to the special training he had before. He had learned to follow orders almost subconsciously, so he took his pike dummy and assumed the ready position for stabbing with his wooden staff.

The Prince and his followers were walking behind them on the wall. Van’er noticed from the corner of his eyes that the prince had slowed down his steps when he was near Van’er.

Roland sighed silently, the sayings ‘a late evening will destroy the morning’, and ‘to get up too early will ruin the whole day’ were really true. Just when he had finished processing the aftermath of the raid on the castle, he was reminded that he had to inspect the militia’s training results. Roland pitied himself. He hadn’t slept the whole night, so now he was sleepy the whole day. But he had to come, since now the team had been transferred to the stage of combat training, and he, as the highest commanding officer, if he didn’t show himself for a long time, the morale of his team would become unsteady.

Well... What would someone usually say when reviewing the team? Roland thought for a bit, ‘Are we only comrades only during good times or are we also comrades during hardships’? If he did not get an answer after shouting this slogan, the whole atmosphere would be very awkward. Maybe it would be better to just pull

someone aside and talk with him, asking him for his impression and earning a good reputation.

So he begun to implement his new plan, and patted a young man who looked fairly sturdy on the shoulders.

“Is the training too hard and do you feel tired? Is eating three meals a day enough?”

Based on his past experiences of watching the news, his response to his questions should be a loud shout, “Not tired, and very good!”

But the result was completely different than what he expected. The man turned directly towards him and went down on one knee, which really shocked Roland.

Van’er felt that he had been blessed, His Royal Highness the Prince actually cared for him and even cordially asked him if he was tired from the training! When talking about the royal family or even only ordinary nobles, they were usually all reluctant to speak a word with their soldiers. He unconsciously imitated a knight’s salute to honor His Royal Highness. Regardless if this ritual was appropriate for him, he only had one thought: later when he returned to the streets, he could be considered a new person.

When he was asked to stand up, his brain was still a mess, so he couldn’t even remember what he had answered.

In the end, His Royal Highness had asked all of them. If someone had any comments or suggestions about the training, he would step forward. Suddenly Van'er's mind was completely clear once again – this was a good opportunity! If his thoughts were true and His Highness' militia had to guard the walls alone, they couldn't afford the heavy responsibility. Maybe my worries of running away or staying are unnecessary, right?

He carefully thought about how to phrase the sentence, “Your Honor... Your respected Highness, the current numbers of the militia is too small. If we line up in the same way that we have trained during training, when the demonic beasts strike, we will only be able to defend one-third of the whole wall and won't survive...”

Even if the prince began to recruit several groups of militia now, Van'er was afraid that the training time wouldn't be enough. In addition, the weapons used by these people would also be a big expenditure, it was already difficult to supply for the 100 soldiers in the time left.

Even now they were still holding their wooden staffs to train.

If His Royal Highness Prince could also realize this point, maybe he would recruit a group of mercenaries from other towns as their main defense. At least they would not need training and could be directly sent on to the battlefield, and they were already carrying weapons and armor, but the price to hire them was relatively high.

Roland thought for a moment, nodded and said, “Yes, you're right, with our current militia force to guard the whole city wall, it

isn't very realistic.”

Van'er felt very delighted, His Highness actually... agreed with his view?

But he did not expect the next words the prince said, “Demonic Beasts are in a sense only a variant of normal beasts, they don't become more intelligent, right?”

“Yes, Your Highness, their base forms are only ordinary animals, so the demonic beasts are still the same, even their habits are basically the same as they were before the change... but I have not seen many of them, so I'm not sure that this is true for all of them.”

“That's what I wanted to hear. Although there are nearly six hundred feet between the Redwater River and the foot of the Northern Mountain Slope, we could lure them to attack a specific area which we prepared beforehand.”

“You mean by using traps?” asked Iron Axe.

“Yes we could use traps, but not the kind commonly used by hunters. Common traps are used to capture prey by camouflage, but I intend to do the opposite. We will set up roadblocks in the direction away from the city walls, such as fences, slopes, and ditches, forcing these mindless demonic beasts to walk around them. Continuous barriers will guide the prey to a designated place, at which we will place our main defense.” when Roland came to this point he directly looked at Iron Axe,” As for how to

lure these monsters, I think nobody knows more about it than you.
“

After a short moment, Iron Axe answered, “It’s no problem to guide them, the wolves have hydrophobia, the wild boars have photophobia, and the other demonic beasts also have their own fears. But Your Highness, this way we would need to face all the evil beasts at one small point, will that not be too dangerous? “

“If we only rely on pikes and bows, that would be true.” Roland took a deep breath and said confidently, “But now we have a new weapon!”

When it was time for the prince’s departure, he once again came to Van’er, “Your observations were very good, what’s your name?”

“Va-Van’er, Your Highness.”

“I will propose for you to be a vice captain for one of the teams to my chief knight, Mr. Van’er, I’m very satisfied, good work.”

Next to the house for the production of cement, Roland built a new house. It was for the production of snow powder – or more precisely, gunpowder.

It only had one big room which had an area of three hundred square meters and only one entrance. He also implemented the most stringent security regime. Two knights were always guarding

the door, and anyone who wanted to enter were required to register first and go through body search, looking for something which could light a fire. Indoors, any source of fire was prohibited, so it was only possible to work during the day. In order to even prevent Nightingale from sneaking into the room, he hung up a cotton curtain above the door.

“This is what you called the new weapon?” Carter was summoned to take a look at the new invention, he took the powder in his hand and took a sniff, “This is not snow powder, right?”

Perhaps Iron Axe didn't know what snow powder looked like, but Carter had often participated in royal ceremonies, so he naturally knew how snow powder looked. It was the alchemic workshop's finest creation. The recipe was a secret to outsiders, but if the prince desired to know it, he would certainly be able to get it.

“It's snow powder, but not entirely,” said Roland, “It's the alchemic workshop's latest product improvement, I call it gunpowder.”

Gunpowder can be described as a product that was perfect for mass production. It didn't need any exotic materials. As long as you had charcoal, sulfur, and saltpeter and mixed them at a ratio of 1:1:7.5 it could be produced without any technical barriers.

In this time period, snow powder was mixed into a ratio of 3:1:1 and it also sometimes contained some strange materials (such as mercury, butter, honey, etc.) which were sometimes mixed into it at a 2% ratio, but with the result of slower combustion and less gas release this held no advantage for the gunpowder. However,

Roland knew that the alchemist would constantly test other ratios, and he predicted that they would only need 30 years until a recipe close to the original gunpowder's recipe would appear.

In the history of Roland's former world, gunpowder was invented a long time before the production of the first cold weapon. The reason for this was because the recipe and the corresponding weapon manufacturing process didn't work in unison.

However, what many people ignored was the fact that one did not need to rely on guns, the gunpowder itself was a very formidable weapon.

Chapter 34 - Trial Explosion

At the beginning, when Roland started to build the cement creation house, he had already created a follow-up plan for future building projects. They were mostly centered on the northern mining area so that they could be easily guarded together – the construction of the brick cottage with a wooden ceiling was very fast, and didn't affect the building of the city wall.

The vast amount of purchased saltpeter from Willow Town was transported to a nearby warehouse storage, and only helpers for grinding or weighing the saltpeter were allowed to enter the warehouse. The same procedure was implemented for the charcoal and sulfur as well, and the entire handling process for each of the materials was done by an entirely different group so that the risk of leaks was as minimized as possible.

Roland weighed out twenty pounds of already produced gunpowder and slowly poured it into a good cut-out bag of sheepskin.

This gunpowder had to go through a strict processing plan. It had to be compacted, air dried, broken down with a hammer, screened, and filtered. If all of the powder was a uniform granular size, only then was it guaranteed to have an outstanding combustion performance. To prevent accidents produced by static, the entire production process was done without any metal products. Instead, they used ceramic and wood products.

After pouring all of the gunpowder into the sheepskin, Roland stacked three more layers of sheepskin on top of the bag and then

tied them together with a rope..

“That’s all?” asked Carter. Can this packet in front of him be called a weapon? Although it’s a modified snow powder product, with sound alone, you can only scare someone, right? A peasant who has never been on a battlefield can affect a battle too, even if only a little. However, any trained soldier or mercenary would never look at them or respect them. But... the chief knight carefully reconsidered once more, the recent doings of His Highness seemingly had no reason at all, but the effects were always very alarming. If the demonic beasts have similar intelligence to that of an average animal, maybe this stuff can be unexpectedly useful? For example, I heard that a loud explosion could frighten animals which would then flee, thereby reducing the pressure on the defender’s side.

Roland gave the wrapped-up gunpowder to Carter, and then he took a pouch with tools to burn the powder, “All right, we have to go outside of the city wall. Iron Axe should already be waiting for us.”

To the west, about two miles from the city walls and located between the forest and the mountains was their designated testing area.

Iron Axe and several other hunters had been waiting here for a long time. In addition to Iron Axe himself, the others were the best local archers. When they had heard that the tasks given to them were from His Royal Highness, they couldn’t wait and immediately followed Iron Axe.

At present, everyone knew that the new lord of Border Town was never stingy regarding the remuneration of his employees.

According to Roland's orders, they built a fence out of wooden poles and ropes, which surrounded the whole testing area so that no one would trespass it. In the direction of the city wall, he had arranged his knights to prevent anyone from accidentally approaching.

Roland checked all the preparations once more and then asked, "Have you brought the prey with you?"

"Your Highness, it is here," Iron Axe dragged a cage with him and stepped forward. Carter, seeing the cage, noted that it was filled with a few pheasants and rabbits.

"Good, put a tied-up animal every five steps away from the center, until you reach thirty steps from the center "

Carter unnoticedly shook his head and tried to propose an improvement, "Your Highness, I am afraid that you chose the wrong animals. You can't test the effect with them, they are very timid and only a little sound needed before will flee. So if you can scare them, it doesn't necessarily mean that you will be able to scare the demonic beasts."

"Scare away demonic beasts?" for a moment Roland slightly hesitated and answered, "I do not intend to frighten them, although the sound of the explosion will be an amazing thing."

He took the bag with the gunpowder from his chief, went to the center, and put it down. Then he cut a small opening into the bag with his dagger and let some powder leak out. With that done, he took out bottles containing gunpowder and sprinkled a small trail of it starting from the tear in the bag while continually stepping backwards.

Today the weather was calm and was very suitable for the first gunpowder explosion ever.

He stopped after he was nearly 100 yards away from the bag.

“Well, here it should be far away enough,” he once again calculated the distance and after the confirmation, he ordered Carter, “Go and get the hunters.”

At the moment, Roland’s heart beat faster as he was full of expectation. He had already done a small test before, so he wasn’t worried about the test results. But what he cared about was that this would be a historical moment. Starting today, thermal weapons will have officially stepped on the stage, and he will forever be remembered as the inventor of this milestone.

After everyone had been gathered together, Roland ignited the gunpowder.

Carter, while lying on the floor, looked on as the distance between him and the sparks rapidly increased. In his heart, he could not accept this as correct..

They were so far away that they wouldn't even hear a bronze bucket full of snow powder, so didn't speak ever about producing any damage so far away, but His Royal Highness the Prince just had everyone lay down on the floor. But since the 4th Prince ordered it and did it himself, it wouldn't be good if he said anything.

The ground was frozen over from the cold temperature, across the chain armor, he could feel the chill spreading up. Carter shifted his body in preparation to save his chest from the cold when he suddenly heard a earth-shattering sound of an explosion –

Since their distance to the gunpowder was too close, the sound of explosion and shock wave reached them at almost the same time. Carter felt his ears ringing and then the world suddenly quieted down. When the earth tremors began to lessen, he looked up and saw a black cloud slowly rising into the sky, followed by gravel and mud which fell like rain.

For Roland, the impact was much smaller than for the chief knight. Even if it was only a little firecracker, he would block his ears immediately when igniting the explosive powder, so he was naturally well prepared. The explosion was not like how explosions were in the movies, where they would always produce big fireballs. In the explosion, a lot of sludge was blasted off the ground, even reaching a height of more than 10 meters into the air. When the dust had settled down, the only feeling Roland had was that the sound was much louder than a loud firecracker.

As for Iron Axe and the several other hunters, they had been stunned. They only knew from Iron Axe that this trip was to test a

new weapon, but they had never expected that the momentum of the new weapon would be so fantastic.

Perhaps it could only be compared to the sky's punishment, lightning and thunder!!

Roland stood up and took everyone back to the center of the explosion. Here, the ground became a half yard deep pit, and the rabbit nearest to the blast center had completely disappeared, leaving only the short wooden stake at which it was tied to in the ground.

He checked the other animals one by one . The pheasants placed at the distance of ten steps and fifteenth steps were lying motionless on the ground, apparently dead. Although there was no visible trauma, Roland still knew that they died due the shockwave.

The only survivor was a gray rabbit thirty steps away, but its thin eardrums were destroyed, and blood was flowing out of the ears. Seeing someone coming close to it, it didn't try to struggle any longer and died, just as if the loud sound had taken its soul.

Carter had to swallow, his constantly ringing ears slowly began to function normally again. He slowly came to realize what His Royal Highness the Prince meant when he said, "I don't intend to scare them". Was it really modified snow powder? With this kind of a result, I'm afraid that the power of the alchemic workshop will become much superior to the astrologers.

The view with which Iron Axe looked at the prince had completely changed, “Your Highness, if the militia really would get such weapons, I think Border Town no longer needs to be afraid of the threat of the demonic beasts. I do not know myself, but can it or be mass-produced?”

Roland thought about it, “Probably not, until the Months of the Demons begins, I believe that we will only be able to produce twenty or thirty of them.” The primary ingredient was saltpeter. In this era, the means of the production of saltpeter was very primitive, they would use the sewerage of the people and their livestock together with a lime mixture to separate out crystals of potassium nitrate. In addition to the upper nobility and the alchemic workshop, there was no great demand because there was almost no purpose for it, so there was not much of a production. If all of the saltpeter was used to make bombs, then it would soon be exhausted.

They would need to use weapons like guns, bows, and crossbows as the main killers of the demonic beasts.

Chapter 35 - Home

Nightingale was walking through the 'fog'.

When she was looking outside from inside the fog, the outer world was only bicolor, black and white.

The lines which were originally the borders of things were no longer very clear. The borders of straight lines, broken lines, and curved lines became ambiguous, like a picture painted by a child..

This kind of feeling was somewhat hard to put into words; Nightingale took a long time to become familiar with how to distinguish between the borders. If Nightingale used her power correctly, she wouldn't be bound by anything while walking through the fog. Even for something like a wall, just looking at it from a slightly different angle would be enough to find a way through, but when looking at it in the real world, there would definitely not be an entrance.

In the fog, up and down, front and back were no longer a fixed concept, they transformed into each other, or you could even say they overlapped. For example, what Nightingale was just doing. She entered the castle, which was under the watchful eyes of the guards, without being noticed. Then, within a step, the lines around her changed unpredictably, and she stepped through the ceiling out of nowhere, arriving in Anna's room.

For her, this was an entirely free world without any rules.

Nightingale was able to relax only in the world of 'fog'. Even though it was silent and lonely, she would never encounter any threat there.

Most of the time, the world in the fog was black and white, but occasionally she could see other colors.

For example, when she was looking at Anna.

The difference between a witch and an average person was their magic powers. Nightingale could see this force flowing and fading in a witch; this was the only color in the world of fog.

She had never seen anyone like Anna before, with such a full and intense color – an aquamarine luster surging within her, in its center it was close to incandescent, she was almost unable to look at it. All this made Nightingale very confused, because in general, the color would show the witch's ability and magic power. In her time in the Witch Cooperation Association, she had seen a lot of witches with the fire ability when they used magic. The luster within them was always the color of orange or red like the cloud of a living fireball, but regardless of size or brightness, other witches couldn't be compared with Anna.

If this wasn't already difficult to understand, another point was even more incredible.

Within her was such an enormous amount of magic, how could she still be alive?

Within the whole Witch Cooperation Association, Nightingale had not found anyone with such an astonishing amount of magical power. Even if it were an adult witch, she would be a dwarf in comparison with Anna. If Anna were to become an adult...

No, Anna would never have this opportunity. Nightingale had to sigh, because the stronger the magic power was, the stronger the bite would be. She could not even imagine what would happen when the time came for Anna to face her trial; she would likely face a terrible ordeal. The pain of feeling that her organs were torn from the inside out didn't let people lose consciousness until they gave up their resistance, accepting their death. They would be repeatedly subjected to constant pain.

She walked out of the fog, letting her temporary depressed feeling fade away, and cheerfully said, "Good morning, Anna."

Anna had already become accustomed to the other side's unwanted behavior of suddenly appearing. She nodded her head, but did not answer, and continued practicing her flame instead.

Nightingale rubbed her own nose and then went to the side of Anna's bed.

Nightingale had already seen this kind of practice many times. She had even been watching when Anna had just started practicing. Accidentally igniting her clothes in the back garden shed, she always had a bucket full of clothes beside herself into which she could change. Later, she was able to make her flame skillfully dance at her fingertips; then, even Roland no longer supervised her practice, but instead tore down the shed in the

garden and turned it into a place to enjoy afternoon tea and sunbathe.

Even so, according to the prince's orders from before, Anna continued to carry out her practice for one to two hours every day – but now in her own room.

“I brought fish cake, do you want to eat it with me?” Nightingale took out a cloth from her bosom, opened it and divided the fish cake into a piece for each of them.

Anna nodded after she smelled the fish cake.

“Go wash your hands before you eat it,” Nightingale laughed. Fortunately, Anna didn't hate Nightingale, after all, it would not be good for Nightingale to speak to herself. All in all, Anna was obviously very concerned for Nana but didn't express her concern very much. In fact, when she was not in front of Roland, she rarely spoke.

In contrast, Roland talked too much. He always had a lot to say. For example, when eating a meal, he would have so many rules – such as ‘wash your hands before eating.’, ‘don't eat too quickly.’, ‘Don't pick it up and eat it after it has fallen to the ground.’, and so on... he could give a long statement for everything .

At first, she was very impatient, but later she learned that it didn't matter because here she was the peasant and he was the master. After all, it was the 4th Prince's castle, since she lived here and ate his food, she reluctantly began to listen to his speeches.

Now, she was also getting used to these rules. She didn't know why, but when she herself, Anna, Nana, Roland and Carter would compete for places in line for hand-washing, she would feel an inexplicable hint of fun.

Anna reached into the bucket filled with well water and cleaned her hands, and then she lit a flame to dry them. After that, she took her piece of fish cake and sat at the table, cutely taking a small bite into her little mouth to slowly chew it.

“You really don't want to go back with me?” Nightingale asked her once more. “There, we will have a lot of sisters; they will take good care of you. Here, you can only live and do something within the range of the castle, don't you feel bored? Although they are called the Impassable Mountains, you can find lots of material to survive, and there we would all be one big family, everyone there has gathered together for the same purpose. Your magic power is so strong, they will happily welcome you. This winter, I'm afraid this winter will be your last...”

When she spoke until there, Nightingale trailed off. perhaps it was already too late, she thought, even if they were back in the camp, for Anna to have such strong magic power, it would be almost impossible for her to get through adulthood. The only thing Nightingale could do for Anna was to stay by her side when she died.

“How was your life as a child, before you joined of the Witch Cooperation Association?”

Nightingale was startled by Anna's question, after all, she rarely

asked any questions. “I... used to live in a big city in the eastern part of the Kingdom. Actually, it wasn’t far from the capital.”

“Did you have a happy life?”

Happy? No, she was unwilling to remember her daily life at that time, she had to depend on others, and was despised and mocked. When they found out that she had turned into a witch, her life became even worse than that of a cat or dog. She had a chain tied around her neck and was forced to work for them. So remembering this, Nightingale shook her head and whispered, “Why are you asking this?”

“I lived in the old town areas.” Anna once more told her own story. “My father sold me for 25 gold royals to the church, but since His Highness had let me out of the prison, I’m living a very happy life here. “

“But, you cannot go out of the castle, and except Roland Wimbledon, the other people outside still hate witches.”

“That isn’t important for me, and he also said that he would change all this in the future, can’t he do that?”

“That will be tough. As long as the church hasn’t fallen yet, they will always speak of the witches as evil.”

Anna didn’t refute immediately and became silent for a long time. It was even so long that Nightingale thought that Anna

would never talk about this point again when she suddenly asked, “Where did you have a better life? When you were with the Witch Cooperation Association or living here with us?”

“You... What did you say ah?” this question caught Nightingale totally off-guard, “Well, of course...”

It would be with the Witch Cooperation Association, right? To tell the truth, she wasn’t really interested in the search for the Holy Mountain, but was interested in the place where all her friends were living.

As for Border Town? If she hadn’t heard that a witch was in danger, she would never have come to this town!

So the answer should be very obvious, but why couldn’t she say it the first time?

Then, Anna begun to smile. Nightingale had rarely seen her smile, her eyes were shining like a lake in which the morning sun was reflected, glistening. Inexplicably, she felt at ease – even if she wasn’t in her own world of the ‘fog’.

“I heard Roland saying that the Witch Cooperation Association was looking for the Holy Mountain in the Northern Mountains and that the Holy Mountain was a secure home for all of you, but for myself I think I have already found my Holy Mountain.”

This castle was her Holy Mountain. Nightingale realized that

although Anna wouldn't live for much longer, her soul already arrived at the place where most witches longed to be.

At this moment, from the other side of the door, running footsteps could be heard. Nightingale listened carefully, they belonged to a panicking Nana.

Then the door was opened, and it was really Nana Pine who rushed in.

While tears ran down all over her face, she jumped into Anna's arms. "Wh-What should I do? Sister Anna, my father has found out that I have become a witch!"

Chapter 36 - Negotiation

Roland was dragged out of bed by Nightingale.

After he had heard that Nana's father came for an audience, he was surprised at first. Soon he realized that this was a rare opportunity – If he wanted the girl to stay during the Months of the Demons and help fight against the demonic beasts, he would have to find a reason for the Pine Family to remain in Border Town during Winter.

Originally, this was a very tricky situation. After all, the 4th Prince's popularity among the nobility had plummeted, and he had a strained relationship with the stronghold. This were the reasons why most of them nobles leave Border Town. However, from the beginning, Roland hadn't considered working together with the nobles. They may have a lot of power, but they weren't suitable for a joined work.

He quickly washed his face and dressed himself, then immediately went into the reception hall.

Mr. Pine was already brought into the reception hall under the guidance of the guards. When Mr. Pine saw the prince, he immediately stood up, enraged, and asked, "Your Highness, where is my daughter?"

This was the first time that Roland saw Nana's father. He had a muscular build, but wasn't too tall, and with his beard he had a very rough image. With his cotton coat that reached his waist and

his leather pants that had very large pockets his dressing style looked more like that of a person from the Orient, rather than someone of noble rank.

“She’s fine, Mr. Pine -“

“Why was she directly let through by the guards, while I was stopped at the door?” Nana’s father interrupted him out of anger. “I need an explanation, Your Highness! Please bring my daughter out and let me see her!”

What was happening? Roland was full of wonder. He was convinced that Mr. Pine was clear about the situation that his own daughter had unfortunately become a witch. So it would be normal if Mr. Pine humbly asked him to hide the message, or he would just allow Roland to solve the problem. But Roland had really not expected that Mr. Pine would be so aggressive and wouldn’t act according to aristocratic etiquette.

As to why the guards let Nana come in without questions was only because of Roland’s standing orders. Nana would come every few days to play with Anna, so the guards were already used to her coming.

After considering for a moment, Roland gave the order to have a maid bring Nana over to them.

No matter how rude the other side behaved, he was still Nana’s father so it was only right to let the two meet and talk. If he showed any intention to send his daughter to the church or

generally to abandon her, it wouldn't be too late to take measures against him.

Nana and Anna both came together into the hall.

At the moment Mr. Pine could see his daughter, the impertinence seen in his eyes immediately vanished. He opened his arms wide in the direction of Nana and shouted loud: "Dad is here, so come to me!"

But the little girl was just hiding behind Anna, only exposing half of her head, "I'll be sold to the church by you, right?"

"Oh... You silly girl, what are you talking about? Naturally, I would never take you to the church, so let us go home together."

This reaction somewhat confused Roland. According to Nightingale's story, Nana was seen by her father when she was using magic. Breaking out into a panic, she immediately fled to the castle in search of Anna. All along the way, she was followed by her murderous looking father.

But as it now seemed he was only looking with eyes full of love and care at his daughter, completely unlike the usual feelings of hate with which witches were typically confronted with.

So, had it only been a misunderstanding?

For a moment Roland hesitated, but then he decided to take the

bull by the horns and said, “Mr. Pine, your daughter became a witch, you surely know that.”

“Your Highness, what are you talking about? I don’t understand you.” Mr. Pine angrily stomped his feet and then went toward Nana, trying to grab her hand. However, Anna stepped in front of him, blocking his view of Nana.

“Father, I have become a witch... I’m so sorry...” whispered Nana.

Hearing Nana mention it once more, Mr. Pine became somewhat anxious, “Don’t talk nonsense! How would you become a witch? What has that guy Karl taught you? I shouldn’t have ever let you go to the college, there they only teach that rhetoric church shit!”

Hearing him talking like this, Roland suddenly began to understand the situation. It seemed that Nana’s father tried to cover everything for his daughter up. Did he misunderstand Roland’s intentions?

So because of this, he was so restless until he could see Nana.

“Anna.” he gave her a sign with his eyes. Anna understood and nodded. Then she stretched out her right hand, in the direction of Nana’s father who still tried to reach his daughter. Flames began to spew out from her palm, direct near Mr. Pines head, nearly burning him.

Mr. Pine was shocked as he immediately stepped away from Anna. Nana also began to panic and hugged Anna's arm trying to stop her, "Sister Anna, don't attack my father!"

"Your Highness, this is a -!"

"As you can see, she is also a witch, just like your daughter," Roland spread out his hand and said, "The reason why Nana has free access to the castle isn't what you think. Can we all calm down and talk about the future?"

At this moment, Mr. Pine felt like he had awakened from a dream-like state, "Ah" he needed to start twice, "Your Highness, I"

"Sit down first and then we can speak," Roland pointed to the table nearby, "also have a cup of tea."

Well, he sighed, my reputation was so bad, they even fear to let their children be near me. Now Roland fully understood Mr. Pine's rude behavior at the beginning, he had only shown his concern for his own daughter. When he had seen his daughter run into the prince's castle, and the guards were already used to her appearance, he couldn't think of any good reason for it.

In case Roland was in Mr. Pine's position, he was afraid he would have tried to tear down the castle empty-handed.

As for why he had denied back then that his daughter was a

witch, his intention was very apparent – he feared that the prince would say ‘Nana has fallen, so she needs to be purified.’ So he tried to convince himself and everyone else, that his daughter wasn’t a witch so that no one would care about her.

Mr. Pine hesitated for a long time, but in the end, he still sat down and drank a whole cup of tea at once. After that, he wiped his mouth and looked a little embarrassed, “Sorry, my behavior was coarse. Excuse me, since when do you know that my daughter has turned into a hic... witch?”

“Since before the winter. I wasn’t the first one who had found out that she has awakened, it was her teacher Karl van Barte. Due to her and Anna being friends, he sent Nana to me, so that I could look after her and that I could protect her.” Explained Roland carefully, “the last one and a half month, she came to the castle to learn her ability without fear of discovery. By the way, your daughter’s ability is to heal. “

“Is that right...” Mr. Pine scratched his head, “So that was the reason why the cat could suddenly run and jump again.”

“Cat?”

“cough cough, in fact, it doesn’t matter. When I came home, I saw a boy who was sitting in the doorway with a cat which was hit by a carriage in his arms. I planned to hide the cat from Nana’s view so that she wouldn’t be frightened. I didn’t think that she had seen me and would immediately run to me looking for the cat. It was very obvious that the cat had been hit, and her leg was broken, ” he looked at Nana and Anna, “So you were friends? “

Anna didn't say what she thought, but Nana quickly nodded her head.

Mr. Pine seeing his daughter's reaction his expression softened a bit.

Upon seeing this Roland asked: "You do not seem to think that the witches were people tempted by the devil and had become his spokesperson."

"My daughter is undoubtedly not a wicked person!" He categorically denied this possibility, "No matter what she has become, I have no doubt about this!"

Anna's father and Nana's father were entirely different kind of people. Roland couldn't help but feel that he now could somewhat understand why Nana was always so carefree, always having a smile on her face. Such a family, for a child it was just like a warm cradle.

"I also do not think so, Mr. Pine," then Roland said bluntly, "Your daughter's ability to heal other people is of great significance for me. I want her to stay in Border Town, helping me to fight the demonic beasts during the Months of the Demons."

Hearing this, Mr. Pine hesitated, "Your Highness, I am afraid I will have to refuse your request. When the demonic beasts come, it will become very dangerous in this town. I cannot leave her in this small town."

Since the Pine Family didn't belong to the territory under the jurisdiction of Border Town, so even he as a prince, couldn't directly command them to stay. But as long as Mr. Pine was willing to sit down and talk, Roland was sure that he could convince him.

Chapter 37 - Family History

“The danger isn’t as great as you think, Mr. Pine. If something is dangerous it will also always offer some opportunities.” In his head the 4th Prince went through all the information his assistant minister had collected once more “I heard that you inherited your title from your father? He became a Knight through merits gathered from battle, awarded the rank of Baron and given his own territories.”

“That is true.” confirmed Mr. Pine.

“It was at the time of the Months of the Demons. A small group of demonic beasts unexpectedly broke through the stronghold defense near the Redwater River and were running rampant. When Nana’s father was on patrol, he encountered the rampaging demonic beasts. Instead of avoiding them like most people would do, he notified the stronghold, asking for reinforcements, and began to siege the demonic beasts to save the nearby town – even though he had no relationship with the town.” While speaking, Roland observed the expressions of the other people, “But Mr. Pine, you should know the things which happened at that time better than me. Your father called for the militia from the town. Then, with his attendants and the militia he fought the demonic beasts and won. That large battle was fought to stand up for the innocent.”

“Yes.” his tone was a bit agitated, apparently full of longing for his own family history, “There was also an unusually big one, some parts resembled a deer’s and some parts a bull’s. It was a fusion of both of them. Its legs were thicker than my father’s torso, and when it was ran, the ground trembled. If I were in his position,

I really wouldn't have known how to beat the monster.”

“But he did it. My father stood near a shallow trench, luring the furious demonic beast over. It accelerated and was trying to take advantage of its speed at the moment of their collision. My father laid down in the shallow trench and wedged his sword between two stones so that only the sword tip was visible. The seemingly unbeatable idiotic beast couldn't stop, and its belly hit the tip of the sword. The entire stomach was cut open; Black blood and some intestines flowed out of its belly. It was so much that my father almost drowned within the trench. Even today, the spoils of that battle, the great horn of the demonic beast, hangs above my family's fireplace.”

Roland, who was sipping his tea leisurely said: “It was an admirable fight, he followed the knight's code of faith, compassion, and bravery. Later he got his knighthood and a manor in the fiefdom of Joe Kohl, who was still the Lord of the Longsong Stronghold at that time. Twenty-five years ago Joe Kohl was promoted to the rank of a Duke by his Majesty Wimbledon III, becoming the part-time guardian of the southern border. With this, the whole southern border territory was placed under his jurisdiction. Unfortunately, after his promotion, Joe Kohl became an eyesore to his former supporter Duke Ryan. “

“Your Highness, you might know well that,” Mr. Pine's voice sounded somewhat frustrated, “even when the ranks of Duke Ryan and Joe Kohl were different, their levels of power were already even. Kohl's blood could be traced back to a branch of the royal family, so his ancestry wasn't worse than that of Duke Ryan's. “

This was a political scheme. Roland sighed, Wimbledon III actually tried to check and balance their level of power.

In order to understand this complicated relationship, Roland had to call for his assistant minister for explanations.

The noble and feudal jurisdiction were extremely confusing. In theory, the higher nobility has the right to issue orders within the territory of the lower nobility. But the actual situation was much more complicated. Duke Ryan and Joe Kohl were an example of this. Although he was placed in the western border territory under Duke Ryan, Joe Kohl, as the king's directly announced count, he had no less prestige and power than Duke Ryan.

When Joe Kohl became the Duke of the southern territory, his power in his old territory became even stronger. This was a method of the royal family of Graycastle to hold the power stable.

“But when you inherited the territory of your father, the trade, and the agricultural production gradually faded” Roland slowly said, “But now, there is a new opportunity in front of you.”

“What is this new opportunity...?”

“Surely you had heard of the famine two years ago. The stronghold was withholding the food for the next months because of the reason that the amount of ore mined by the inhabitants of Border Town was too small. This year, we are faced with the same dilemma again. The unexpected collapse of the Northern Slope Mine didn't leave any route of retreat for the people of Border

Town. We must block the demonic beasts at the new city walls. Perhaps the fight won't go smoothly, but as I said before, facing this dangerous task also means a new opportunity for us."

"....." Mr. Pine had to first understand the meaning of what the prince said, so he only frowned and didn't immediately give his answer.

"To be honest with you, you do not really resemble a typical noble." Roland gently smiled, "No noble would go out dressed like you, and your hands are full with crusts and calluses. Mr. Pine, you didn't let your father's inheritance down, right? You're a knight with excellent fighting skills. "

He certainly did not let his father down, Roland was very sure of this, or Mr. Pine wouldn't have trained and ran through the woods for a whole day. According to the information provided by Barov, in the last week, Mr. Pine had spent at least three days training in the forest. On each visit, he was always fully equipped, and if he couldn't afford it for his attendants, he directly hired some helper from the town of Orion. Some people were just born for battle; Mr. Pine was obviously such a person.

"If you will stay in Border Town, I will provide you with the opportunity to let you regain your father's glory. Just like he did, you will get the chance to obtain honor and outstanding achievements with only your sword and your courage. I'll also reward you with a territory in the east of the Border Town, and you will become a Viscount appointed by me." Although this would be a rare situation, the commitment would be valid. As an adult Prince, he was able to legally canonize Viscounts, Barons, and

Knights. However, he could only seldom confer such titles to other people. One, it would undercut the regional system of aristocracy, and two, if the other side refused the offer, it would become more awkward. Roland didn't care about the opinion of the local nobility, he just wanted Nana to stay in Border Town. As for refusing Mr. Pine, Roland wasn't too worried. After Joe Kohl had become the guard of the southern border guard, his relationship with Mr. Pine's father didn't carry on. He had entirely abandoned the Pine Family.

When hearing this, Mr. Pine finally began to talk again, "Then... Your Highness, if I stay, can I still send Nana back to the stronghold? Until now, no one had ever tried to resist the demonic beasts in this place. If we fail, I do not want my daughter to be buried here."

"As I already told you in the beginning Mr. Pine, the danger in staying here is relatively low. Have you ever thought about what would happen if Nana was found to be a Witch in Longsong Stronghold? There it would be entirely different than here in Border Town. The stronghold is completely in the possession of the church. They have already grown their roots in the city for a long time. Their believers and overseers are everywhere in the city. At the moment she is exposed, even I won't be able to save her. "

Roland paused, then added, "Border Town will definitely not fall! When the Months of the Demons arrive and the demonic beasts come, I'll be on the wall to lead my people and fight alongside them. Our opponents are nothing more than a group of mutated beasts, they are not invulnerable. Your father had no cover and was able to win against them in an open surrounding. However,

we have the new city walls. If. instead.. I really only mean, if an accident does happen, I'll take measures to guarantee that Nana will immediately leave the town," he paused for a second, "and naturally, Anna will also move. I will prepare a boat for them at the dock beforehand, so I can promise you that they will be safe."

"So... I will believe in you, Your Highness," when saying this, Mr. Pine stood up and went directly down on one knee to give the standard knight salute to the prince, "and I am willing to fight for you."

.....

After Nana and her father had left, Anna rolled her eyes at Roland

"What are you talking about?" She firmly said, "I'm not going anywhere."

Chapter 38 - The Era Of Hot Weapons

Iron Axe became aware of the fact that they were now under watch.

The hunters who had participated in the test explosion moved together into a two-story house near the castle. Looking through the window, he could see that the house was encircled by stone walls and guards were stationed at the entrance.

He did not mind this regulation, and the fact that His Highness only sent two guards to oversee them showed that he trusted them.

Until now, Iron Axe continued to repeat the roaring explosion within his head – until now, there was never a weapon that could bring him such a strong shock. In the extreme south of his homeland, he had seen how orange fire erupted out of the ground, and this fire could continue to burn for decades; he had seen endless storms with monstrous waves... however awfully unpredictable these powers were, they were the will of Mother Earth or the god of the sea. They were the iron whip that disciplined all living things.

But now, His Highness began to challenge the power of the gods, obtaining a power only seen during heaven's punishment – although when compared with the real lightning and thunder, the difference was still great; reaching such a realm of power wasn't possible for humans.

In the Sand Nation, anyone who would participate in such a

demonstration or later use it would normally get their tongue cut off. Of course, this was not the safest way to keep secrets. Only the dead could keep secrets from spreading. As a foreigner? They would only see him as blasphemer, and it was forever impossible for a foreign clansman to get into the core hierarchy.

The Prince knew that Iron Axe was only a half-blood, but he still allowed him to witness the curse of fire. Even more, he also let Iron Axe be responsible for the formation of the hunting squadron. The trust His Highness had within him was burned deep into Iron Axe's heart.

During his time in the Sand Nation, he had experienced countless betrayals of friends or family who framed him for their wrongdoings. When he fled to the Kingdom of Graycastle's south border, he still had to suffer discrimination because of his half Sand Nation and half Graycastle lineage. He eventually arrived in Border Town, disheartened. Here, he intended to rely on his hunting skills to spend the rest of his life in peace. However, he had never expected to meet His Royal Highness, the Prince, here. And of all things, he had never expected that the prince would even trust him.

He had no doubt that with this new weapon, the one who would win the battle for the throne would be Roland Wimbledon.

When he thought about fighting for the future king and the promising opportunities he would get, Iron Axe became wholly excited.

“Everyone, come down to gather!”

When Iron Axe heard this shout, he took a quick look through the window and saw Roland's chief knight Carter and four other knights coming.

Iron Axe first finished dressing himself, then walked down the stairs to stand at attention in front of Carter. Since he had participated in the militia training, he knew that His Highness preferred discipline, since he would adjust them to a unit of uniformity. The other members of his hunting squad were a lot slower. It took about six to seven minutes before they lined up as a team.

"Everyone, follow me to the old place." Carter didn't care much about how the hunter squad lined up. Instead, he went straight to the city wall.

It was still the same place as the explosion test. But this time, His Highness didn't set up a safety area.

In addition to Roland, there were already four knights waiting for them – they were all Carter's subordinates. Iron Axe noted that His Highness had begun to play with an unusually shaped iron stick while explaining something to the knights.

When Roland saw the hunting squad, he came to them and asked, "How is living at the new houses? Have you already become used to it?"

"Thank you for Your Highness' care." everyone bowed and stated

that the new homes were comfortable.

In fact, the new houses they moved into were many times better than the old homes. At least they had no air leaks, and the roofs were also not made of translucent straw bedding, but were made of neat and tidy tiles instead.

“This is good,” Roland nodded, pleased, “The current arrangements are needed out of security reasons. But you will only need to live there until the end of the Months of the Demons, then you will be able to move back to your former living places. In addition, the salary for the first month has been paid to your families, and every weekend you will be allowed to see them face to face. Of course, you will be accompanied by guards. “

“Thank you for your kindness, Your Highness.” Said the hunter squad cheerfully.

This was really a bit surprising for Iron Axe. Leaving aside the law of Sand Nation, even the military management of Graycastle shouldn't be this lax. Could it be that this was because of His Highness' kindness? Iron Axe became somewhat worried, if His Highness wanted to compete for the throne, he needed to be ruthless – this he knew well from his life in Sand Nation.

However, when the 4th Prince began to talk about new weapons, based on the development of the gunpowder, he put his worries into the back of his mind. Iron Axe stared without blinking at the two iron bars which the prince had placed in front of them.

“These weapons are called ‘guns’,” Roland said, “Next, I’ll tell you how to use them. “

In the next half hour, they had to learn how to use the new weapons.

Take the black powder which was the cause of the explosion and fill it into the barrel of the gun. Then, a lead ball was stuffed with a poker into the barrel, straight to the end. After that, they had to pour the gunpowder into the igniting chamber, aim, and then pull the trigger.

Iron Axe had considered himself to be a master of many weapons, whether it be swords, knives, hammers, axes or spears. He was well trained with all of them, but he had also needed long years of training and combat skills to master them. Learning how to use a new weapon in only thirty minutes, he was afraid that the speed to master this weapon could only be compared to the crossbow.

The other gun was handed to Carter.

The chief knight was also full of interest in the novelty of this weapon, and he didn’t want to put them down.

After several rounds of simulation, Roland set up two targets to let them see the power of the guns. The first target had wooden armor in front of its chest. The wooden armor was held up by two knights standing at a distance of about thirty feet away.

The Prince led Carter and Iron Axe through the shooting technique. Then, they aimed and pulled the trigger.

When they heard the loud sound of fire, every person present jumped up out of shock. Iron Axe was no exception, but soon only surprise was left on everyone's face.

Looking at the targets' wooden armor, they could see a small hole. The lead ball had cleanly shot through the chest armor's thickest part.

Before shooting, Iron Axe had carefully observed this armor. It was clearly not a handicraft workshop's inferior product built from bad materials. The marks of the hammer and anvil on the neckline proved that this was a product of Graycastle's blacksmith standard. The thickest part was half a finger thick and was strong enough that it could ward off a direct hit from a crossbow, fired at the closest distance. To deal with this kind of armor, a heavy crossbow or a warhammer would be a wise choice.

So comparing it with a crossbow, the difficulty to use the weapon was the same, but the power of a gun was far better than that of a crossbow. In addition, the gun's loading speed and the loading speed of a crossbow were nearly equivalent, so... looking at the target which was thirty feet away, Iron Axe couldn't see a problem.

"Your Highness, how many weapons do we have of this kind?" asked Carter.

“Currently, only these two and until the Months of the Demons, we can only produce two more at most.”

Iron Axe could see that hearing this, Carter was clearly relieved. He was able to guess Carter's thoughts. If this weapon was easy to manufacture, then with only a few days of training, everyone would be able to train a large number of 'express warriors' who were bringing guns to battle. Then people at any age, with any strength and even any sex – even a fragile woman, could be a significant threat to the knights.

Although the shock he got from this weapon was smaller than that of the curse of fire, it still was a powerful weapon. Iron Axe thought, with this great power they could easily kill a large number of rugged-flesh demonic beasts from high up on the wall. Even if they would face a mixed species, with these firearms, maybe the outcome would be not so embarrassing.

But the real significance of such a weapon was clear to Roland.

He personally opened the door to the time of wars with hot weapons.

Chapter 39 - The Winter Is Coming

Roland was standing on the city wall, facing the north. This past month, he repeatedly checked the castle, the mine, and the city walls in a kind of three-point loop. He checked them for every possible detail so that he wouldn't miss anything.

The militia became very adept at handling their weapons. Due to Carter's repetitive drills, they were able to stabilize the pike until the Militia Captain loudly gave the command to slash with their pikes.

Standing behind the Militia was the Hunter squad. Every hunter who remained in Border Town and was good with either the bow or the crossbow was incorporated into this squad. These seasoned hunters were the backbone for killing the demonic beasts. Standing only twelve feet away from demonic beasts on the city wall, it was nearly impossible for them to miss their target.

The last line of defense were Iron Axe, Carter, and two hunters from the elite team who were under Iron Axe. The parts manufactured by the blacksmiths were enough to let Anna weld four flintlocks. They would only shoot the flintlocks when a mixed species attacked or the hunters with crossbows were unable to penetrate the skin of the demonic beasts. Their location on the wall wasn't set, so the four of them had to patrol the whole 200 yard long defense line. If there was a need for them anywhere, they would appear.

As for the explosives, they were kept under heavy protection next to the wall in the warehouse. To keep everyone safe, the

gunpowder was stored in its three components, and it would only be put together on the city wall when needed – after all, if the powder detonated at the wrong time, the self-inflicted damage would be even greater than the damage from the demonic beasts. The teeth of the demonic beasts may be able to crush the cement, but if the explosives went off, the whole wall would be destroyed.

So far, Roland had organized two test runs, both including the use of the explosives. Thanks to these two exercises, the militia was used to the loud roars of the explosions and were no longer so scared that they threw their weapons away. The other advantage was that when the defenders discovered that the prince held such incredible weapons in his hands, the team morale suddenly began to skyrocket.

“Your Highness,” Barov tightened his collar, “We have already spent most of the ore income in the last half month, so if the Months of the Demons actually goes on as long as the astrologers have predicted, I fear that the food won’t last till the end of winter.”

“Then I want you to fill up the entire vault,” Roland said without hesitation, “Make another deal with Willow Town and don’t make it the only one. The first steam engine has already been transported to the mine, and the gravel from the collapse has already been completely cleaned up. During the entire winter, we can still get a little yield from the mines. Rough stones are especially in demand. Do not emphasize on price. Instead, sell them as soon as possible so that our wheat and meat storages are always as full as possible.”

Barov nodded, "I'll give out the orders immediately, Your Highness. Just..."

Seeing the hesitant look on his assistant minister's face, Roland certainly understood what he wanted to say. "Do not worry, I have already arranged a boat. If the line of defense is broken, I will leave the town immediately."

"That's excellent to hear." said Barov, relieved.

Roland smiled at him and said, "You can go. After all, you have enough to do. I have to look for someone else."

After Barov left, the Prince slowly stepped onto a watchtower. This place was at the center of the city walls and was their highest point. From here, he could overlook the whole front line, parts of the jungle, and the nearby hills. At such a height, the wind was blowing quite strongly but Roland didn't care. Only on this high and open platform could he somewhat calm down and forget the coming war.

"You lied to him," someone next to him suddenly said, "You don't intend to leave this town."

"Life is already so difficult, keeping a few secrets sometimes is good for everyone."

"You're talking nonsense and don't understand the situation. If you already consider the identity of a prince as a difficulty, what

would you see us as?” Nightingale emerged out of the fog. “Even if you will not be the king, you still have to live through the five-year-long struggle for the throne because you’re one of the main parties. Compared to worrying about such unimportant matters, you should better accompany Anna. I’m afraid... she doesn’t have much time left. “

For a moment Roland remained silent, “I don’t think that she will die during the Months of the Demons.”

“Why?”

“She said that she will not lose to the devil’s bite,” he paused for a second, “And I believe her.”

“You actually believe what a witch says,” Nightingale shook her head, “but we are cursed by the devil.”

“Are you? Well, I also believe you.”

“.....”

Brian was wearing his civilian clothes and was standing in front of Greyhound’s tombstone.

He gently stroked the surface of the new stone, it was a pure white stone and on its surface were engraved the words: “In

memory of one of the silent heroes of Border Town.”

“Greyhound.”

“I’ve already realized my biggest dream. At the end of the Months of the Demons, His Highness the 4th Prince will hold the canonization ceremony for me. But, I don’t want to sit on the bed waiting for my canonization. My wounds have already healed, so the city wall is the place where I should be. The Months of the Demons is near, and the demonic beasts may be strong, but they will have to go through the line of defense the militia established, and will no longer be able to advance. I will also take over your part in defending the town, and brandish my sword in your name. All this will not be the end. Your murderer is still alive... But he will not live much longer, His Highness already promised this to me. The next time I come to you, I’ll bring good news.”

Brian bent down and placed a bouquet of flowers at the gravestone.

“So goodbye, my friend.”

“Sister Anna, are you scared?” Nana, who was lying on Anna’s bed, asked her this.

“Afraid of what?”

“The devil’s bite we have to face this winter. I became a witch

during the autumn of this year, so it will be the first time I have to face it...”

“Well, the first time,” Anna thought, “will be very painful, and sometimes you think that you can’t wait any longer and wish that you could finally die.”

“Ah!” Nana began to shout out of shock, but she immediately covered her mouth.

“But you will survive, just like me.”

“I do not know...” whispered Nana, “I’m not like you, so strong, and afraid of nothing.”

“I’m not really that strong,” said Anna as she closed her eyes. The scene when she met Roland for the first time emerged in her mind. Down there in the cold and dark dungeon, Roland’s clothes were draped over her body. He softly said that he would hire her – until now, she still got goosebumps when remembering this. “Sometimes you will encounter situations or things that will give you the will to live on, even if you need to struggle hard to survive.”

“Such as...?”

“For example, meat marinated in soy paste,” Anna sighed, “How should I know what you dream of? – Ah”

Seeing that Nana was entirely staring at her, Anna wiped her face with her hand, “What are you looking at? Is there some dirt on my face?”

“No ...” Nana shook her head, “I’m just a bit surprised, you’ve never talked to me so much ... Sister Anna, the appearance you had when you just closed your eyes and thought about the past, you were so beautiful.”

Anna rolled her eyes, jumped out of the bed, and went to the window.

Nana followed directly behind her, “What are you looking at, do you want to flee into the forest?”

“The forest is in the West,” answered Anna snappily, “Here you can only see the Redwater River.”

“Sister Anna, look!” The little girl pointed at the sky.

Anna was startled, then opened her window. A surge of wind mixed with little snowflakes came into the room.

She held out her hand, catching the flower-like sparkling snow. She could feel a chill coming from her fingers.

“It’s snowing.”

“.....”

After long silence, Nightingale opened her mouth and began to speak once more, “You actually didn’t lie.”

“Of course,” Roland laughed, “I have very little reason to lie.”

Nightingale said nothing. She only tilted her head, and an unknown look emerged in her eyes.

Suddenly, she felt something cold on her neck, and she couldn’t help herself from shrinking away. She looked up only to find that unbeknownst to her, the snow had begun to fall on the walls. Under the gray sky, there seemed to be an uncountable number of snowflakes. They danced in the wind, flying all over the place, accompanied by the shouts of the militia.

...The Months of the Demons had begun.

Chapter 40 - Letter

The firewood was burning violently, but Gerald Wimbleton didn't feel much of the heat.

Although he was in a large tent made of stitched leather, and the ground was also completely sealed without any air leakage, he still felt cold. His toes were especially cold, they were almost frozen to the point that he couldn't feel them any longer.

"This damn place, even the urine freezes when you take a piss." he spat and stood up. He grabbed the table on both sides with his hands. When he used all his strength, so that even his hand became red from the effort, the six-foot square wooden table became lively and left the ground.

After he put the table at the edge of the fire pit, Gerald felt a lot more comfortable. He took off his shoes and put his feet next to the fire, warming them in the heat. He spread out the text scroll with his hands once more and continued to write the unfinished letter.

"Dear lovely Olivia."

"It has been already a month since I came to Hermes, but of course, the Church prefers to call this place their new Holy City. If it wasn't for the Months of the Demons, I wouldn't want to stay here for even a moment. I just want to get back to you and share the warm bed with you once more."

"Faithful to the convention, the church is monitoring us with

their own forces instead of supporting us. It's kind of ironic, isn't it? Speaking about the church, I have to admit that what they were able to do is really amazing. I can still remember the time when I was here for the first time. It was around twenty years ago. In addition to the mountains and rocks around Hermes there was nothing here besides a little church at the bottom of the mountains. But now, they have not only opened up a road for a carriageway up the mountain peak, but they have also established a large-scale fortress city."

"During the summer, you really should come and take a look at this city with me. The new Holy City is even grander than our Graycastle. Do you remember the theater in Graycastle? You and I had gone there to watch "The Revenge of the Prince". You were so impressed with the theater's architecture; the interior was so spacious that it was unbelievable."

"But after you see the Holy City's new Hall of Military Affairs, you will think that the theater in Graycastle was only a shack. It is hard to call it a building, I think it's more like a piece of exquisite art. It's so spacious that it could swallow five theaters. However, not a single pillar supports the exterior walls. The walls are held up by eight behemoth-like demonic beast bones. Between the curved bones are many smaller bones which are connected by hemp ropes, and the roof hovers in midair as if it were on a pole. How could they think off a building like this?"

"And those bones, if they were stripped from a demonic beast, I bet that guy's size was certainly more than a hundred feet. Probably only in Hermes will you be able to encounter such a monster. But honey, please do not worry, even if the demonic beasts are massive, they are still the devil's minions.

In the presence of God's Eye of Retribution, no evil can escape God's jurisdiction! Whether it is a demonic beast, a witch, or the devil himself, their only fate is to turn into ashes!"

When he had written until here, Gerald Wimbleton put down his pen and loosened up his tingling hands. This was really strange, normally he could hold his 15 lbs. heavy two-hand-sword all day, but while holding the pen he was only able to write a few sentence before he felt so tired. He smiled in a self-deprecating way and thought that he really was made for a yokel's life.

"When speaking of demonic beasts, I suddenly think of my fourth brother. He was assigned to Border Town, such a miserable place. I'm afraid he has already turned tail and fled to Longsong Stronghold – even there, the demonic beasts will not be able to reach him and the stronghold's defense is comparable to Hermes. But I think this is not his fault, even if I went to that place, I would only be able to take refuge in the stronghold. Here it can be seen how unfair my father is. Just because our younger brother performed exceptionally intelligently from an early age, he decided to let him inherit the throne. Father forgets that he himself didn't win the throne with calculating means. Since our mother's death, it has become more and more difficult for me to find out what father is thinking. "

Gerald hesitated before he began to write the next part of his letter, he did not know if he should tell his real intentions to Olivia or not. He paused for a moment, but then he decided to write it down. If his plans went well, he should already have arrived at the Palace in Graycastle before she received his letter.

“My dear, Astrologer Ansger was right. If I do nothing, ultimately the throne will not end up in my hands. Ansger observed the stars and what he said was, “The Star of the Apocalypse will burn for the next four months before it leaves its orbit again.” This tells me that I obviously have little time left and cannot wait in vain any longer like this.”

“After today’s battle, I will quietly return to the capital and meet my father, and I will take my loyal soldiers with me. Here maybe I have much less opportunities to get riches like in the City of Golden Harvest, but instead there is no shortage of brave warriors here. I just have to throw some coins around and make some promises, and they will follow me like hungry wolves, and help me reach my goal. Of course, I do not want to start a revolt. I just want to personally ask my father why he gave the orders to start the battle for the throne. In the end, what was it that let him forget that I, as his eldest son, have the right of inheritance?”

“Ansgar has already arranged everything for me. Olivia, my love, you will only need to wait a little longer. The day when I become the King is the day that I will marry you as my Queen. If I fail miserably... you shouldn’t come back to the capital, but instead, you should stay in the Kingdom of Eternal Winter. “

“Love you, Gerald.”

He carefully folded the letter and put it in an envelope, then sealed it with wax. After checking it a few times, he knocked on his table and his personal guard quickly entered the tent.

“You have to deliver this letter to the hands of the Rosefamily in the Freezing Wind Mountain Range. You do not have to travel all day and night. Don’t even take a horse, just travel dressed as an ordinary traveler, as a passenger on a wagon from town to town. You only have to remember one thing; this letter must be hand-delivered.”

“Yes, Your Royal Highness!”

“Good, you may leave.” After Gerald waved his guard away, he simply sat down at the table once more, letting his feet hang over the fire pit.

If something happened, he would have no way out.

He closed his eyes, recalling scenes of his childhood. At that time, he was playing hide and seek with his second brother and his third sister in the King’s Garden. When his third sister fell down, she needed her two brothers to take care of her. Exactly when had it began that the three of them became more and more like strangers?

Gerald shook his head, putting his confusing thoughts aside. It wasn’t suitable for him to become sentimental, he thought, there was only one possibility to end this – he himself had to sit on the throne.

At this moment, the dull sound of a horn could be heard in the tent.

“Ohh ohh ohh ohh ohh ohh ohh——-“

“I’m coming!” He jumped up from the table and put on his shoes. Stepping out of the tent, he saw that the whole camp was a riot. Everywhere, soldiers were running and waving flags, merging into one big chaos, getting into battle formation. From the distant mountains a muddy echo came in continuous stretches.

When the horn blew, it meant the demonic beasts were attacking.

“Come with me!” He rode on his warhorse, taking his guards with him.

Only one person remained standing on the walls of the Holy City, in order to experience its grandeur – it was like an insurmountable natural moat, standing across the path through the impassable mountain range. The pass to the top was flat and wide, it was wide enough for dozens of people to pass through side by side. At the beginning of the path, there were cliffs formed by a glacier on both sides, but the later part was a plateau.

This was why the church desperately wanted to build the new Holy City to the top of the mountain.

Using this terrain, they built a line of defense that was almost impossible to break through.

However, Gerald Wimbledon looked at it more in long run. They

were able to transport so many stones and timber from the foot of the hill to the top. In just twenty years they were able to build a city in Hermes, the power The Church had exhibited was astounding.

But regardless of how tired he was of doing business with The Church, Gerald had to admit that they also had their strong points. If they didn't build the stronghold in Hermes, all countries on the continent would have had to face a catastrophe. They were also responsible for the convention against the Demonic Beast Horde.

Every year during January when the demonic beasts attack, the four Kingdoms which border Hermes must send troops to support The Church and fight together under The Church's verdict.

Their four banners were floating in the wind. A snake wrapped around the scepter of the "Kingdom of Dawn", the shield and sword of the "Wolfsheart Kingdom", the icerose of the "Kingdom of Eternal Winter" – as well as the tower and pike of the "Kingdom of Graycastle".

Looking at the black spots appearing in the distant sky, Gerald Wimbledon clenched his great sword.

Chapter 41 - The Appearance Of The First Demonic Beasts

As Brian had said, once it began to snow in Border Town, it would not stop soon.

In one night, the town had been covered in a layer of white glaze. During the early morning, the snowfall had eased off. Only a few snowflakes occasionally dropped from the sky, but the weather was still gray. When he thought about how he would not see the sun for several months, Roland thought the idea was still a bit inconceivable.

This was simply illogical, he thought, though it was already very weird that magic was a common thing in this world. However, how could demonic beasts have an impact on the sky? Unfortunately, he didn't have any weather satellites to look at this world's cloud formations.

Walking on the road in the direction of the western city wall, Carter couldn't help but exclaim, "The town is deserted, there were still a bunch of people who followed the nobles who withdrew!"

"That's good, at least they will not hold us back." answered Roland as his breath fogged up in the cold air, "I have arranged for Barov to hold a census during the winter."

"What is a census?"

“It is a statistic produced from going door to door, counting the number of people who stayed behind, asking them for their names and what kind of a job they have. All of this will then be registered.” Roland explained, “As a result, during the war we will know how many human resources we can deploy, and after the war, pension can be implemented quickly and efficiently. “

“Uh... What?” Carter blinked confusedly and then laughed, “Your Highness, you are really not the same as before.”

“Oh?”

“In the past you would say something, and I wouldn’t understand it. You would do some unfathomable and mysterious things, but after all, they did not confirm with the identity of the prince. And now...” Carter paused and seemed to consider his next words, “whether it was those strange training regulations or the novelties of the alchemic workshop, the results were surprisingly effective. Perhaps this is what my grandfather meant when he said, ‘extraordinary people are extraordinary, because they can always see possibilities which ordinary people overlook’. I have a feeling that there really is a possibility for you to become King.”

“...Yeah,” suddenly Roland got a warm feeling within his heart. Is there any better feeling than when other people recognize your hard work? For a short time, he felt full of strength and felt that the gray sky wasn’t as depressing as it was before.

As the prince arrived at the wall, the militia, who had already

cleared away all the snow, bowed to pay their respects.

Roland thought that they should also learn to salute, and he asked “How was the situation last night?”

“There were no traces of demonic beasts,” replied Iron Axe, “Your Highness, according to past experiences, we will still have a relatively stable time period after the first snowfall. During this period, the number of normal animals is still larger than the number of demonic beasts, and if there are demonic beasts they will be of the weaker species. “

Roland nodded, “You still have to continue to be vigilant.”

The regional rear walls had been transformed into barracks, so if there was no danger, most people could stay in the camp to rest and save energy. Roland implemented a rotation system, taking into account the low winter temperatures. Each team would only need to perform two hours of patrolling before they would be replaced.

All these measures were set by Roland. He had asked Brian how it was in Longsong Stronghold and learned that they had no rotation system against the demonic beasts. The new recruits would be assigned to watch the movements of the demonic beasts and had to stay on watch the whole day. So consequently they would slack off, to the point that situations where soldiers deserted would occur. During the winter there were twenty to thirty people who were hanged because of dereliction of duty or violation of military orders.

If they found traces of demonic beasts, it would become a mess because they didn't assign people to their own defense sectors. Thinking of the level of the art of war during this time, Roland already had a clear understanding of it. They paid extreme attention to personal honor and valor, and even emphasized plundering. Even knights would be in the front lines when charging into a city, nevertheless they didn't need to plunder too much.

Roland once more patrolled along the wall and saw that everything seemed to be going smoothly, but Roland found out that he had ignored a problem.

That was the roadblocks.

These obstructions were currently still clearly visible and would lead the demonic beasts towards the right section of the wall, but if what Brian said was true and the snow would fall for two to three months without any interruption, it could come to the point that the demonic beasts wouldn't see any obstructions and would attack all of the six-hundred yard long wall. His militia force was clearly too small to attend to such a large battlefield.

Sending soldiers down to clear the snow was a bad idea, because a few species like the demonic wolves were extremely agile, so he would definitely lose soldiers.

Perhaps he would have to rely on the power of the witches.

For example, he could let Nightingale take Anna out of the city to melt the snow with her fire and then sneak back – just like how she had brought Nana in and out of the Pine Family’s home.

At this point, he heard a call from an observer on his left side.

“Look in front!”

Roland and Carter both looked towards the position the observer had referred to. There, a group of small shadows crawled out from the snow, moving slowly in the direction of the wall.

The hunter who was in control of this defense section turned to Roland and asked, “Your Highness, you say whether or not...”

“Handle the situation according to the former drills, so judge the situation for yourself to determine whether you should blow the horn,” Roland ordered, “at this point, you are more experienced than me.”

The soldier hesitated, but he eventually pulled the string off his crossbow, and stood further down the wall to observe.

Roland nodded his head in satisfaction. For now, when the number of demonic beasts that would attack Border Town was still unknown, it would be most important to maintain order on the wall . After all, they could quickly organize their defense according to the steps drilled into them from before.

Gradually, the shadows came closer to the wall. When they were 50 yards away from the wall, Roland was finally able to clearly make out their appearances.

Probably a variant of foxes?

Their fur was grayish black and their eyes were red. When they were at the walls they were panting heavily.

“It looks like it wasn’t long ago that they were turned into demonic beasts. They aren’t a threat,” said Iron Axe while aiming with his bow.

“You mean they were infected by the Breath of Hell which was expelled in the West?”

“It doesn’t happen only in the West,” Carter came over and answered, “the Gates of Hell can open anywhere in the mountains, there is no place safe from it in the mountains. In the North, there is an especially large path which is often under the attack of the demonic beasts. There, it seems that a part of the never ending Impassible Mountain range was cut off. For more than a decade, this path was the main direction of attack from demonic beasts.”

The maniac monsters only lingered for a short moment at the base of the wall before they raised their heads and released grim growls towards the crowd on the wall while preparing to leap. However, Iron Axe released his bowstring, and his sharp arrow accurately penetrated the neck of one of the demonic beasts, firmly nailing it to the ground.

Roland noted that the blood which flowed out from the beast was black.

It was the same kind of erosion for the demonic beasts and witches, but why could the witches still save their consciousness and be saved after their awakenings, when the animals would always turn into maniacs while their bodies mutated? If I have the opportunity, I need to go and take a look behind the Mountain of Despair, thought Roland. In the Prince's memory, it was a place where no human being could set foot, it was the place where the Gates of Hell opened. However, because no one had ever visited it, most of the knowledge of it came from ancient books, and he had no way to verify the rumors, so he had some doubts about the Gates of Hell.

Chapter 42 - Accidents

“What happens when a demonic beast bites a human?” Roland asked. “Will they become the same like the demonic beast?”

Roland hoped it wouldn't turn into a medieval version of Resident Evil. After all, with their current level of technology they had no way to extract the virus and produce the required antigens.

“Of course not,” Iron Axe gave Roland a kind ‘How can you ask such a question?’ look, “They would turn into a corpse.”

“What about their meat, can we eat it?”

Carter exclaimed loudly, “Your Highness! How can you think about eating the meat of demonic beasts, they are contaminated with the Breath of Hell, ah!!”

Roland looked at Iron Axe, who nodded and said, “Your chief knight is right, I have cut off meat from some demonic beasts to feed to my dogs. The result was that my dogs died shortly after eating the meat.”

“That happened? That's really a shame.” Roland sighed, during this time, the food sources were scarce. If they were able to eat the demonic beasts the winter months would turn into months of simple harvest. Think about it, the whole forest of animals would turn mad and run in the direction of Border Town, so the militia would even be able to save hunting gear!

After he walked along the whole wall, he decided to pay a visit to Nana.

Roland had requisitioned the residence of a noble who recently left Border Town and used it as a field hospital. Of course, he claimed it as a school for foreign medicine. But just in case, it was near the city walls and was one of the best guarded places in Border Town.

When the former owner of the residence returned to Longsong Stronghold he had taken all his property with him, and the other inhabitants of Border Town were always ready to give up their homes. So, the housing was quite large, but they couldn't have many murals, carpets, porcelain vases, or other kinds of decorations. If it wasn't fairly clean, it would just look like a house that was vacant for a long time.

Roland turned the first floor into one big room. Only the stairs to the upper floor and a small hallway were left. Then, he put ten beds into the room. With this, his hospital was finished. It was quite a simple shape, there were no nurses and no doctors, even the ten beds were unlikely to be used at all – after Nana's treatment the patients weren't required to lay in the beds, her treatment immediately bore fruits.

During the day, Nana would normally stay on the second floor of the hospital and Anna would come by when she herself had nothing to do. Sir Pine and Brian were responsible for the first floor, and two guards were stationed at the entrance.

However, Roland did not expect that the first patient of the field hospital would be a worker from the Northern Slope Mine instead of a soldier from the militia which defended the walls.

Nils felt his hands trembling.

When he heard the hoarse scream of iron again, he tried to pick up his pace once more, but even with his fastest speed he couldn't fly.

This was all because of his negligence, he thought. Damn, how could he forget the repetitive warnings of his senior knight?

If he had known earlier, he wouldn't have grasped his chance to work with the big guy!

Since the big guy was installed at the mine gate during the night, the miners' work became a lot easier.

Originally, the most tiring part of the job was to drag the ore out of the mine when the mining basket was filled with stones. Generally, two people would push from the back and the rest would pull from the front. After years of usage, the originally uneven tunnel ground became flat due to the transporting of the baskets. The pad at the bottom of the iron ore basket also required frequent replacement.

A week ago, the chief knight commanded that the senior knight

and his men to transport a lot of strange-shaped parts made out of metal up to the mine, and then in the next few days they assembled them into a furnace. Nils had absolutely not foreseen that this furnace could move by itself when fueled with fire. It could not only move, but it also had extraordinary strength.

The senior knight had said that it was His Royal Highness' invention and was seemingly called the steam engine.

First, a basket had to be fastened with a rope to the steam engine, then a fire had to be lit before the big machine would begin to hum. Then, the winch began to turn and the basket was quickly hauled towards the mine entrance.

Incredible!

The senior knight had selected a person responsible for the steam engine after several test runs . When Nils was selected, he was very pleased with himself, since he had waited a long time for such a good opportunity. After all, he just had to stand in front of the machine! He would no longer have to dig out stones or minerals, and he would never ever need to push a basket. That last mine collapse still left him spooked.

The words the senior knight told him were still in his head.

He said it wasn't a difficult task. The big guy would do all the work, all he had to do was to pull the green lever first and then the red lever second. The senior knight also said that the green lever was linked to the intake valve, while an exhaust valve was linked

with the red lever so that the steam would pass through the pipe into the cylinder. After the basket was pulled to the mine entrance, he would have to do the reverse if he wanted to stop the machine. First, he had to lift the red lever and then the green lever. With, this the steam would be discharged from the side of the boiler. After each cycle, the oven needed be supplemented with water until it was full – although he didn't understand what a valve and a cylinder were, Nils still promised to do everything step by step.

However, the senior knight stressed two points that were most important. First, the order could not be wrong. To start the engine, the green lever was first before the red lever. To stop, the green had to be closed after the red. If he made a mistake, it could lead to the destruction of the machine. The second point was that when he was discharging the steam he had to constantly remind the miners to step back until the red lever was completely lifted.

The first point Nils had engraved into his head, even with closed eyes he wouldn't make a mistake. But with the second point he had some problems.

Today, he was shutting down the machine as usual. He noticed that other miners were no longer around. He felt that he would be a fool if he shouted a warning when no one was around, so he was totally absorbed in pulling the red lever. The red lever was a bit hard to pull, and out of exhaustion he had to bare his teeth during the pull.

He hadn't expected Titus to appear in front of the stove when he pulled the lever – Nils hadn't seen him due to the steam engine's big size and because of the loud noise it created, he hadn't even

heard the footsteps. The white steam which was exhausted from the boiler directly rushed into Titus' face!

Nils was stunned out of fright, he only saw Titus suddenly falling to the ground and rolling around, holding his face and screaming his life out – Titus screams were so heartbreaking for Nils that they directly attacked the core of his being.

Soon, other miners gathered around, opening Titus' hands by force to take a look at his wounds, only to see that his face only vaguely reminded them of a human face. Blood was oozing from his cooked and raw face and his eyes were turned into white pearls. All the people present were sure that Titus couldn't be saved.

Nils' soul slowly came back to his body. Titus had always taken care of him, due to his young age, and the work Nils was assigned was less than that of the other people, but the wages Nils got were never less than that of the others. And now, this accident only happened due to his negligence.

Between his grief and anxiety, Nils suddenly remembered what the senior knight also said. If one of the miners were accidentally injured, he should be brought to the safe area near the walls. There was a newly opened medical center there.

Although Nils knew that such a serious injury was an incurable wound and that the size of the injury was too big, even if herbal medicine could help a little, it couldn't stop the deterioration of Titus' health. Then, Titus would get high fever and would soon fall into a coma. But nonetheless Nils still took Titus into his arms, regardless of the confused looks he got from the nearby people, bit

his teeth together, and ran.

If he did nothing and Titus died, Nils was afraid that he could never forgive himself for the rest of his life.

Chapter 43 - Be Strong

“Sister Anna?”

When Nana heard thunderous footsteps coming from the stairs, she ran to the door and took a quick look, but she was soon disappointed because she found out that the person who was coming was His Royal Highness, the Prince.

“Anna should still be working, but she will probably come by later.” said Roland when he arrived at Nana’s side.

“Work?” Nana had recently often heard this word out of the mouth of the Prince, “You mean she is burning this gray mud powder?”

“For now, yes.”

Nana pouted as she went back to the table. I also have a job, she thought. My job is to stay here and wait to treat the soldiers who are injured while defending the town.

Roland asked with a gentle smile, “How is it? Do you feel bored when Anna isn’t here?” as he took a chair to sit by the fireplace.

“Well,” Nana supported her chin with her hand so that she couldn’t nod and give a true answer. It wasn’t that she didn’t want to treat the injured, but ... the sight of the injuries was just so horrible.

She could still remember when she had to treat Brian, it was the first time she had to treat a human. The man was covered all over in blood that it seemed like he had bathed in blood. A reddish-brown blood clot had solidified in the pit of his stomach, his mouth resembled the look of a dried fish, and he was disgorging white fluids and red blood. Then... Nana had fainted.

It was downright disgraceful.

Nana raised her head to secretly glance at Roland. She saw that he had leaned back in his chair and was snoring. The Prince seemed to be tired, she thought. His jobs were building the walls, training the soldiers, and protecting the town from the invasion of the demonic beasts.

When he came to request her help, although she first hesitated for a long time, in the end she did not refuse.

“You will encounter some things that make you want to live on, even if you will have to struggle to live on.” – Nana didn’t understand what this meant, but when she closed her eyes, Anna would appear within her mind – with her pair of bright blue eyes, just like a lake, surrounding her slowly. This was the reason she agreed to Roland’s request.

She wanted to be as strong as her sister, Anna.

Suddenly, footsteps could be heard from downstairs again and Nana immediately jumped off her chair. She wanted to go to the

door to see if it was Anna who came this time, but suddenly she was stopped by an invisible hand.

“Just wait a minute, there is more than one person.”

Nana patted her chest in dissatisfaction, “You scared me, sister Nightingale.”

Soon the door was open, and this time it was Brian, who was stationed here, who entered, “Miss Pine, please come down. You have a patient who got burned.”

This was work for her, right?

Nana took a deep breath, “I will come down.”

She walked downstairs while two guards were busy with carrying an unconscious person towards a bed. Standing beside the bed was a short man with a face full of anxiety. Brian walked up to the patient and neatly tied the patient's hands and feet to the bed. When he was done tying, he closed up the area with previously prepared curtains and then led the little man out of the room.

When Roland came down he asked while rubbing his eyes, “What happened?”

“Your Highness, North Slope Mine sent a seriously injured person, he looks like he was scalded.”

The Prince walked over to Brian, “He was burned by the steam engine, right? Was there a problem with the engine? Did you send him to Nana?”

“He is in the medical room.” Brian pointed to the direction of the door.

“I need you to look into this case.” when he finished speaking, Roland walked towards the medical room.

Nana slowly stepped near the injured man, only looking at him carefully within her peripheral vision. When she saw his face, his facial features had turned into paste, forming a round ball. What should have been red skin was dehydrated and inhumanely white, it just looked like a rag was laying on his face. At his neck were blisters as big as small eggs, some of them had even been broken, and the mucus oozing out from the blisters mixed together with the blood in the pillow. In the flickering shine of the fire, his appearance was more horrible than the devil in her nightmares.

She took two steps back and closed her eyes. When she opened them again, she saw her father watching her, full of concern.

“Are you okay?”

Nana nodded, thinking of the words Roland had told her – “You only need to treat the injured the same as you treat the little animals.” She once again moved towards the bed and stretched out her hands.

An incredible feeling emerged within her body and gathered within the palm of her hand. She saw a ray of light being emitted from the fluorescent green liquid flowing out of her hands as it fell on the injured face. For her, this fluorescence light was obvious, but to others it seemed to be invisible. Then, the wounds began to change. The scorched skin was constantly shed off and new skin began to regrow at a visible speed.

The wounded man's groans of pain gradually diminished until it stopped, and his breathing eased. It seemed like he just fell into a deep sleep.

Nana exhaled, relieved. This time her own performance was surely better than last time, and she thought, I should have made a great progress with my training, right?

"My God, is this what His Highness meant when he spoke of your healing ability? This is the first time I've seen you do this." asked Sir Pine. Then he exclaimed, "Good girl, you're awesome!"

"It is the power of the gods," Brian said in the same tone of awe, "It was also Miss Nana who healed me when I was heavily injured, I really owe her so much."

Ah, he is such a fool. Nana had to cover her face because of shame, doesn't he know that it was sister Nightingale who smuggled him out and saved him on that day?

"When did that happen?" asked Sir Pine, full of wonder, "Why

didn't I know of it?"

"Oh... Their powers have nothing to do with God, they belong to the witches themselves." Roland opened the curtain and stepped inside, coughed once and changed the subject, "How are his injuries?"

"He has basically recovered," Blaine excitedly said, "It's like he was never hurt! Your Highness, with the help of Miss Nana, during the Month of the Demons, everyone who is fighting has a chance to survive!"

"As long as they don't die on the spot, there will be no problem with saving their lives," the Prince confirmed, indicating Brian that he should stop since the man woke up, "Your name is Titus, right?"

The man who was named Titus had a look full of confusion and asked "I ... What happened? Am I dreaming?"

"You're not," Roland said. "You're still alive."

"Are you ...! I have seen Your Highness at the square!" The man suddenly woke up like he was hit by lightning, jumped up from the bed, and fell to his knees, "Your Royal Highness, was it you who saved me?"

"It was the daughter of the Pine Family who saved you. She is a witch and has a healing ability."

Nana's mind froze, he directly said that she was a witch, would she be okay? Sure enough, the look in the man's eye changed immediately, "A woman... she is a witch? Your Highness, aren't they the devil's ..."

"Don't speak such nonsense!" When Sir Pine heard him speaking such words about his daughter, he angrily cried, "My daughter has nothing to do with the devil, but she even saved your life instead, man! Do you think the Devil would reach out to you with a helping hand?!"

"No, no! Please forgive me for being impolite," Titus pulled his head immediately into a deep bow, "Thank you for saving my life, Miss Pine."

Nana suddenly felt inexplicably uncomfortable. If she could, she would immediately rush out of the room, but a voice in her mind repeatedly reminded her, "be strong."

Later when Titus was sent away, Sir Pine worriedly asked, "Will this really be alright, Your Highness? In this way, I'm afraid, my daughter will no longer be able to lead a normal life."

"You have to think on the bright side, Sir Pine," comforted the Prince, "We have to take advantage in this kind of situation, so that we will be able to break the deadlock. With this, Nana will may be truly free in the future. Otherwise, in the following years, she will one day be exposed. Until then, I am afraid she can only live a life in seclusion. "

... Real freedom? Nana didn't know what this meant, because even now she felt very free. But His Highness said when they would achieve it, sister Anna would also be able to leave the castle just like herself. Maybe they could even return to teacher Karl's college, right?

Chapter 44 - Hidden Answers

It was already late when Roland went back to the castle. It was snowing heavily again.

He went directly into his bedroom, took off his coat and shook off the snow that got caught in its collar. Then, he hung it on a rack next to the fireplace.

“Your Highness, don’t you think that you have progressed much too quickly?”

Nightingale’s voice came out of nowhere, and then she became visible to the prince.

“You mean the situation with Nana?” Roland poured each of them a glass of wine. Although the wine was more bitter than he was used to, slowly he had become used to its taste.

Nightingale took the cup offered by the Prince but did not drink – she was waiting for the prince to give a longer answer.

“There will never be a more appropriate time than now,” said Roland. He drank his cup of wine all at once, only to fill it up once more afterwards. “I planned to let Nana play a big role with her ability during the Months of the Demons. So, it would have been impossible impossible to conceal her identity as a witch anyway. She can instantly cure fatal injuries! This is nothing close to what ordinary herbs or bloodletting can do, everyone will want this.”

“Border Town is in the most western part of the kingdom. Here, so far away the center, the church’s influence is very limited – if I were them, I wouldn’t be willing to spend so many Gold Royals for a place which could be abandoned at any time.” Roland continued, “We even don’t have a small town church. The missionary left with the nobility to Longsong Stronghold earlier. Knowing all this, what do you think Border Town is? It is an island, totally cut off from the outside world.”

“... This was your plan since the beginning?” Asked Nightingale, surprised.

Roland nodded, “The never ending snowfall will close the road to Longsong Stronghold, and the entire town will be in my hands. We have at least three months to reverse the “witches are evil” point of view. With only mouth-to-mouth propaganda, the effect will be very limited. So, we must rely on real life experiences in order to quickly eliminate the hatred caused by ignorance and misunderstanding.”

That was the reason why he wanted to let everyone think Nana was the cause of Brian’s rescue. He wanted to create a different image of Nightingale.

There existed a legend of a nurse who made an all-out effort to look after wounded people, resulting in the plummet of the wounded mortality rate, from 42% to 2%. Thus, the fighters conferred her the title of “Lady with the Lamp”, and the popularity of the whole nurse profession had been elevated to the rank of worship.

Nana's ability to heal had more to offer than only heal the injured, as long as someone didn't die on the spot, she could restore him completely like he was never injured. This would be more important and boost the morale more than any weapon upgrade he had presented.

At the same time, thanks to her family's decline within the aristocracies ranks, her father had to deal with hunters and farmers often during the weekdays. Because of this, he had a very calm and kind attitude towards the normal civilians, and he even allowed Nana to visit Karl's Collage and learn with them. This kind of act was absolutely unthinkable for even the lowest of Barons, they would never agree if their children had something to do with the peasants – in their eyes, these people were the so-called untouchables.

“This ... can we really do this?” Even Nightingale, when facing such a big monster like the Church, felt extraordinarily small and weak.

“If we never try to change, we will never know the answer.”

Roland did not expect that he would be able to change the view of all the inhabitants of Border Town, but he at least hoped to plant seeds within the hearts of some and get a small team of supporters. Later, he wanted to relay on this seeds, to let them grow and let them spread.

Within three months, many changes could be achieved.

Nightingale thought about it and then whispered, “Why do you want to step out of the masses and help us witches?”

In order to use their power for the production of resources, make himself more powerful, and have a better chance in winning the throne – of course, all this answers were not suitable to say aloud. Even so, Roland was a mechanical engineer, he had played a good variety dating games, so he could even be seen as a veteran who knew a lot. So with the experience of having lived for more than forty years in two different worlds he knew that this time he had to face a crucial question and give the right answer.

So he thought carefully about his next words and said slowly, “I haven’t told you yet, but I do not care about the background of any inhabitant of Border Town. I hope that one day, in my territory, even witches can live a life as free as any other person.”

This time Nightingale was silent for a long time, and the only sound left was the crackling of the burning firewood. Her face, highlighted by the flickering flames, was like an otherworldly picture.

When she spoke again, Roland had enough time to free himself from the beautiful illusion. “You really don’t have to accomplish all this.” Her voice was small but gentle, “Please forgive me for lying to you before ... My sisters in the Witch Cooperation Association have been living the life of refugees for far too long. They do not expect so much, their only goal is to have a place where they can live in seclusion. Even living in this castle would be enough.”

“How would that be different from living your life within a cage?” Roland shook his head, but then he suddenly came to an understanding. His eyes became wide open when he looked full of shock at Nightingale, “What do you mean ... Are you saying that you are willing to bring your sisters back here?”

Nightingale sighed and avoided looking directly at the prince, “When I do this, you will become the enemy of the Church.”

“Their arm has been stretched too far and has become too thin.” Roland didn’t mind the future road, due to the slogan “the power of the King is granted by the God”, the Church and the mortal power will conflict sooner or later. As for Border Town, we only have to live through the next months, then they will not be able to do much to us. Here we are thousands of miles away from their seat of power. What do you think will happen when the Bishop of Longsong Stronghold holds a military trial to come to crusade me? My father would never allow this to happen, this would be a much too great of an attack against his Royal power. “

“...” Nightingale didn’t know how to answer, she gave him her salute and left. When Nightingale was out of the room, Roland let himself fall onto the bed, and took in a deep breath to relax. There were some things he didn’t tell her. For example, he didn’t tell her that the center of the church’s power was a thousand miles away. In accordance with the world’s news circulation speed, they would probably only be able to react in late spring. In addition to the distance there was also his identity as a prince, so a big possibility would be that they would only send envoys to ascertain the situation.

As a result, Roland thought that they would only arrive after half a year. By then, he himself would already have a solution to break their strength.

Thus, the biggest risk of his plan wasn't the church, but rather the witches themselves.

This point was only known by himself.

Although at the moment the witches were at a disadvantage, the current situation would not last forever. The power of the witch did not rely on blood heritage, so there was no pattern to who would awaken, it was all random. This meant that they could not be eradicated, so their number could only increase.

The Church relies on their God's Eye of Retribution, and for the moment they can still maintain their advantages over the witches with it, but it can only offset their magic. However, the witch awakening not only gives them a wide range of ability, but also boosts their physical power and mental reaction speed. Even their appearances would become more beautiful than ordinary people.

They essentially could be regarded as a "New Mankind."

The more brutal the oppression becomes, the more intense the resistance will be. How much damage would be caused to Graycastle if the witches started and lead a riot? Because the Church gave birth to the hatred, once they lost control, it would be likely that the hatred would turn against all the residents of the

Kingdom of Graycastle.

Roland didn't want to see that happen.

So, he needed to start from Border Town, and lay down the structure to contain both sides. Later, he would need to extend the structure to Longsong Stronghold, and in the end to the whole kingdom.

He was creating a world in which common people and witches could coexist.

Chapter 45 - Conspiracy (Part 1)

During the night of the new moon, the silhouette of Gerald Wimbledon could be seen near the walls of the City of Graycastle.

After his few months of stationing at Hermes came to an end, he was now finally back, he thought. The long journey left him totally exhausted, but he was still vigilant of his surroundings. He reined his horse to stop and motioned his deputy to go and inquire about the situation.

If everything went as planned, the Scholar Ansgar should have had all of the guards replaced with guards loyal to Gerald. When his deputy gave the signal, the replaced guards would let down the side door of the drawbridge.

Gerald was wide-eyed, and was staring forward, out of fear that the guards would overlook the signal.

The truth was that he hadn't waited very long, but for Gerald it felt like time froze and he had to wait forever. When his eyes had already ached to their breaking point, he finally saw a short flicker in the distance – two short flickers at the bottom of the wall, and then three times above the wall as the answer, signaling that everything was going as planned. Gerald had to take a deep breath before giving his troops the signal to march forward.

Seeing this, he already believed himself to be only a step away from the throne.

Gerald rode shoulder to shoulder with his deputies through the side door in the wall.

Behind him were more than twenty men of his cavalry following him. No one spoke a word, the only sound which could be heard was the pulling of the reins to move the horses slowly forward.

The walls of the City were built out of stones from the Fallen Dragon Mountain. Under the illumination of the torches, the brown and dark-red stones made the wall look like it was overflowing with blood. The entire wall was twenty feet wide, and during the construction of the biggest wall in the world at that time, more than a thousand hard laborers, masons and slaves had to die.

In the minds of the people this city was known as an impregnable fortress, but now Gerald and his men were easily crossing the walls, conquering the city with units from within. Somehow, he had to think of the Church's new Holy City; would their more ambitious and absolutely impregnable walls also fall due to treachery from within?

"Your Highness, I have already waited a long time for you here." Gerald could hear Ansgar's voice through the gates. There, the scholar was already waiting for him with a small troop. Seeing Gerald appear, Ansgar quickly dismounted and bent down to bow.

Gerald pushed his distracting thoughts aside. He was probably too excited, making it impossible for him to restrain his emotions, but he let his imagination run wild, "You have done well! Did you also replace all the palace guards?"

“I was going to, but then an unexpected problem appeared in the plan. Your Silver Knight who had already agreed to help was unexpectedly transferred to the south exit three days ago. Until now, we haven’t had time to switch the new guards with our guards.”

Gerald frowned, this meant that he could not take twenty soldiers with him into the palace. Gerald himself wouldn’t be stopped, but the guards would never let this many armed people into the Royal Palace.

“Let it pass, split the team into two parts and come with me to the Palace door. Keep the door under good guard and don’t let any outsiders hinder me on my way,” he hesitated for a moment to make up his mind. Although the plan had changed, the situation was still under his control. Naturally at night, guards would stand outside his father’s chamber, but as long as someone could distract them for a moment, he was sure to cut them down with his sword.

Inside the city.

Everything looked the same as it had been when he left. Although he was now walking through the city at night, he was still able to recognize every street. This was his territory, there existed no doubt. Everyone jumped off their horses and marched rapidly forward in the direction of the palace. When they arrived at the door, his more than twenty soldiers spread out according to the new plan, lurking outside the palace. It was just like Ansger had said, except the guards were surprised as to why the Prince wanted to speak with the King so late at night. However, after hearing

Gerald's bluff about having to discuss important matters, they directly opened the door and let him enter.

After all, he was the eldest son of the King and the first heir to the throne.

Ansger and Gerald went together through the garden and the halls of the Palace. In front of the Palace was the residence of Wimbledon III. Ansger raised his torch and waved side-to-side with it. Immediately after that, a guard appeared out of the shadows and knelt on one knee, pleading, "Your Highness, please come with me."

Gerald became irritated, he smelled blood.

Didn't Ansger say that they had replaced all the palace guards? He looked through the shadows of the flames and took a good view at the man, he was indeed a familiar person – a knight who supported Gerald in the fight for the throne. This gave him a little peace of mind.

"What happened, had someone entered the castle?"

"It happened earlier this evening, Your Royal Highness. His Majesty had summoned a maid for this evening, but she came exactly at the moment of the changing of the guards." the other replied, "Please be assured that we have handled the situation well."

He summoned a maid? His father had not touched a woman for a long time – since the death of his mother. Gerald was a little surprised, but now he had not the time to entangle himself in such a trivial matter. So, he nodded and said nothing more about it, and instead went into the castle, followed by his guards.

Even with his eyes closed, Gerald could find his way through the castle. He had lived here for more than twenty years. Where there was a secret passage, where there was a secret door... everything was crystal clear for him. However, the purpose of this trip was to persuade his father to pass the throne to him without bloodshed. So surreptitiously sneaking into the palace was meaningless, he had to get rid of the guards stationed outside of his father's chamber. Then, he could let his father fully understand his situation, so that they could sit down and talk seriously about the ownership of the right to inheritance.

If he could not convince him ...

Gerald Wimbledon took a deep breath and gave a hand signal for his followers to stop, then pulled out his large sword and took it in his hands.

At the end of the corridor was a bronze door, which was the only entrance into the Palace. The door to the bedroom was at the end of the corridor behind the bronze door. Usually two or three guards would be stationed here, but this would be the first time in the history of the Palace that the entrance to the King's bedchamber would be unprotected.

Gerald first opened the door enough only for small slit, then he

slid in with the side of his shoulder, quickly entering the room and taking a battle-ready position with his sword – but inside the room it was totally quiet, and there was nobody speaking. At the same time, an intense smell of blood entered his nose.

The thought of premonition flashed through his mind. Then, he directly ran towards his father's chambers.

There, Gerald saw a staggering scene.

His father Wimbledon III was sitting in his bed only wearing his nightgown, and his upper body was leaning on a pillow. His robe was open, and in his chest stuck the hilt of a sword. Blood trickled down his belly and soaked the quilt.

Standing beside his father was actually his brother, Timothy Wimbledon.

“How how is this possible?” Gerald stood in place, totally startled.

“Just like you, brother,” Timothy sighed, “I really didn't want to do it.”

He clapped his hands, and a large number of armored soldiers rapidly entered the room, surrounding Gerald, “This was a chess game and I wanted to finish it in accordance with the rules. Brother, do you know why I couldn't? If you have to blame someone, blame Third Sister; from the beginning she didn't intend

to follow the rules, but of course ... you did. Otherwise, why would you rush back to the King's City after hearing Scholar Ansger's prediction? Seriously, if you didn't come, I really would have been helpless."

"Ansger!"

Gerald grit his teeth and looked at Ansger, enraged. Out of fear, Scholar Ansger stepped backwards. While raising his hands he said, "I didn't lie to you when I said 'The Star of Apocalypse has begun its arrival. It metaphorically hunts everyone who has stepped away from the right path, but it also has the meaning of downfall.'"

Gerald now fully understood. From the beginning, he had fallen into a well-designed trap. The smell of blood in front of the castle was probably not left by a maid, but instead it was his Silver Knight who was removed instead of transferred like they had said. However, his biggest point of despair was that Scholar Ansger, who had taken care of him for longer than a decade and had taught him how to read and write, had chosen the second prince in the end – just like his father.

"Timothy Wimbledon," He was a son like Gerald himself, but Timothy alone got all the attention of their father. He got the best territory allocated to him, so it was totally unexpected that he would be the one to strike first! "You're the devil from hell! "

For a short moment, anger flashed within Timothy's eyes, but it soon disappeared "Do you really think so? Dear brother, if you were unable to change our father's choice, did you really intend to

stop there and go back? Do not cheat yourself.”

Chapter 46 - Conspiracy (Part 2)

” ... ” Gerald didn’t know how to reply. The only thing left for him to do was to drag his own brother to hell with him. However, after some time he calmed down and asked, “Do you think you can get rid of me by telling your lies?”

“Get rid of you? No, that wouldn’t help me at all dear brother. I was helpless, I had to do it.” Timothy’s tone remained calm, as if he was only stating facts, “If I had honored father and waited five years, I was afraid that I would have had to face 3rd sister’s pirate fleet. You know what she has been doing recently, right?”

Gerald shook his head and felt a stabbing pain within his heart when he realized how great the distance between himself and 2nd brother had become. He remembered that his brother was very clever from an early age but wasn’t good at riding, shooting or fighting. As long as he had an opportunity to deliver a slash to Timothy, he could behead him – “She set up her own army, brother. Really, I admire her. She had even begun to organize it before father gave the order to fight for the throne, this was something even I didn’t expect. We got along so harmoniously during our childhood, so how could it have developed like this? Why do we have to kill each other for the throne?” Then, he took a step towards Gerald and asked, “Take yourself for example. I’m afraid that you now want to split me in half with your sword, right?”

” ... “

“I know you do, brother, since you told me before that when you

want to kill you get a frightening look in your eyes.” Timothy sighed, “I will bluntly tell you, I had to end this fight for the throne beforehand. Otherwise, if I had waited for five years I would have had to face Garcia’s fleet. She has already controlled Clearwater for several years, and has made it a city suitable to handle business and the recruitment of soldiers unlike Valencia, the City of Golden Harvest, which is only good for business and not suitable for rearing soldiers.”

“I need an army strong enough to withstand 3rd Sister’s fleet, which isn’t something I can achieve when I can only depend on a trading city. Gerald Wimbledon, tomorrow you will be sentenced to trial because of the assassination of the king and your absence from your territory. I, on the other hand, will travel back to Valencia during the night so that I will be there before the news of father’s death spreads. I’ll be deeply heartbroken, and will accept the throne only because I, as the 2nd Prince, am the duty-bound inheritor. Anyway, I will become the King while you will be sentenced to death by the guillotine.”

“You ...!” Gerald roared, enraged, and attacked his brother. However, the distance between him and Timothy was too far, so his sword was intercepted by two Knights who then slashed at him in return, and a sword pierced his calf. Gerald lost his balance due the sudden injury and fell on the ground. The guards tightly swarmed around him and pinned him to the ground so that he could not move.

“You want to hold a trial? Do you think so lowly of me? I will tell everyone about what happened! I will let all people know what kind of monster you are!”

“Of course I will not allow you to do that, brother,” Timothy patiently declared. “The Alchemic Workshop has invented a drug named “Forgotten Language”, it uses the modulated poison of the sand lizard from the southern border and is mixed together with milk. After drinking it, you won’t be able to emit any sound. Rest assured, you won’t feel any pain, but the flavor is mellow and it’s befuddling. If you have to blame someone, then blame our 3rd sister, the genius. If it wasn’t for her, I wouldn’t be forced to do this.”

Timothy waved his hand towards the Knight Commander, who gave his salute and lead Gerald out of the Palace. The other guards also left so that the last remaining people were Scholar Ansger and Timothy.

“Your Highness, since your taking over the throne is already settled, I will call you Your Majesty from now on,” said Ansger as he bent down.

“You have done well. When I sit on the throne of Graycastle, I will honor our agreement, but ... but after I saw how miserable my brother was today, I think some provisions should be added to our agreement to ensure my safety.”

The scholar’s look changed immediately, “Your Majesty, you mean -“

“Rest assured, I just do not want to be betrayed.” Timothy pulled a small pill from his pocket, “This must have been so much for you to handle. Maybe you should take this pill, it will dissolve after seven days. This should be enough time for me to travel to

Valencia, getting the sad news and then to travel back to Graycastle. Later, when I become King, you will become the Chief Astrologer like we had agreed, but I do not want the others to offer you a higher price.”

“Your Majesty ... You have to be joking,” Scholar Ansger’s face became pale and his look became pained. But in the end, he grit his teeth, and eventually swallowed the pill.

“Smart choice.” said Timothy as he nodded with satisfaction, “You may go.”

.....

When the palace was deserted, the prince’s face darkened.

He grabbed the porcelain that was placed on a small table beside the bed. Several sounds of porcelain shattering could be heard. So, the guards who were stationed outside immediately rushed in. “Your Highness?”

“Get out!” He shouted.

“Yes,” the guards quickly lowered their heads and went out, closing the door behind them.

Damn, this wasn’t how I had planned it!

Timothy hadn't planned to kill his father. With Wimbledon III's favor, he only wanted his father to take notice of Garcia's actions and stop her. His older brother Prince Gerald, on the other hand, would be a pawn within Timothy's hand.

Timothy had thought that this plan couldn't go wrong. By controlling Gerald's mentor, Scholar Ansger, Timothy could manipulate his brother from the dark – Within the Astrologers Association, Scholar Ansger's status wasn't high, but when Ansger wrote some letters to Gerald, the 1st prince was quickly hooked. All this went exactly like Timothy had planned. His elder brother was strong in battle but he wasn't good at thinking, but he still wasn't willing to hand over the throne.

With each letter they exchanged, Scholar Ansger would increase the ambitions of Gerald, guiding him along the path Timothy had prepared. When the last letter with the astrological predictions was sent, Timothy secretly returned to the side of the King, informing him that the 1st prince may come to pressure him into abdicating the throne. There was no doubt that once this matter was confirmed, the King would immediately imprison the prince out of rage or even sentence him to death or exile instead.

Then, King Wimbledon would have to focus on his other children, and when he saw that Garcia was actively developing her military forces, she would inevitably become a second eyesore for him.

But ... who could have thought that when Timothy had revealed the news, the King would only smile, pull out his personal dagger and directly stab himself in his chest!

Everything happened so quickly that Timothy had no chance to intervene, he could only watch his father die.

He slowly sat down beside the bed. In the first moments after the incident he thought that this was all an illusion. His father's final smile was just like a nightmare, causing his hair to stand on end. Timothy went through the whole thing over and over again, even inspecting his father's body, but he still couldn't find a single clue as to why his father had killed himself.

He also thought about the idea that it was simply a double, but he couldn't find any flaws in the situation in front of him. Even the remnants of his father's old wounds were exactly the same as he remembered.

Seeing that Gerald had arrived to meet the king, he calmed down. With this he could push the blame for King Wimbledon III's death onto the 1st Prince, and then he could use his own identity as the 2nd Prince to inherit the throne. After a smooth coronation, he would no longer be restricted to his own territory. Then, he could mobilize forces throughout the whole Kingdom to pressure Garcia, forcing her to give up the Harbor of Clear Water.

It seemed that the ending was better than it could have been, but Timothy still felt deeply uneasy ... As if he was led by an invisible hand, who was already able to control the war of Graycastle's upper nobility, but Timothy himself knew nothing about it.

However, at the moment he could do nothing else besides

claiming the throne, so he had no choice. Timothy Wimbledon swore to himself that if he ever found out who was the cause, he would let them know what happened when they angered a King!

Chapter 47 - Market Circulation

For the last week, it was fairly calm for Border Town.

Iron Axe and Brian both said that the strength and number of the demonic beasts would gradually grow with the progression of the Months of the Demons. So, taking advantage of the situation where the pressure on the line of defence wasn't strong yet, Roland once again sent a boat with ore to Willow Town.

Since the steam engine was put into use for mining in the North Slope Mine, the number of miners had been reduced by half, but the production had steadily improved. Now, it had been restored to the level of production from before the collapse. Using a machine to do the job saved a lot of manpower.

Meanwhile, under Roland's orders the mine production systems had undergone a preliminary reform. The former fixed payment for each day was changed into a variable pay. He let Barov put together a statistic about last year's average amount of ore produced daily. With this he could set a standard and everyone who mined more could increase their pay. An increased number of gemstones would result in a big reward. This move effectively increased the workers' enthusiasm for mining, so the mine became a bustling area.

Roland naturally wanted to do more with his ore, now that he had more ore in hand.

In addition to the plan to put a second steam engine into

production, he also intended to manufacture a number of manual lathes.

This lathe can be seen as something historical, it was commonly seen as an essential machine for implementing other tools. The anvil can be regarded as the most primitive tool – it was used for manual fixing and creating.

It was better used to create, because using it to fix was really too inconvenient, thereupon people would often try to fasten their product or place it in a recess on a table to fix their processed parts. For example, the early matchlock and flintlock gun barrels were placed into a recess on the anvil to be pounded out by hand.

Later, manual creation became too slow to meet demand, so they needed tools to increase production speed. The lathe could be used according to different purposes, the tools could be fixed according to each need, and the manual and machine processing could be used together. So, the lathe could effectively improve the strength of pure manual labor and could be changed for every weak point.

Roland also considered a manual milling machine.

Although the milling machine had various functions, he wanted to mainly use it in order to process involute gears, so its architecture could also be simplified correspondingly. With a slot for a fixed tooth plate and a rotatable steel disc, customized cutting gear could be easily manufactured with Anna's help – by grinding off and polishing the top layer after it got heated to a red hot state, erasing the slag on the iron, and then immersing it water to harden it, it would become a highly rigid custom disc.

After the key problems were solved, Roland immediately gave Carter the order to hire two carpenters, who would build him a milling machine. Meanwhile, Anna continued to manufacture other metal parts in the castle backyard.

Roland had to say, that with Anna's help, metal processing had become as easy as forming clay, especially after she had mastered the retrieval of her flame. At the moment she was pre-treating small items, forming their rough shapes within her hands. Seeing Anna take an iron ingot in her hand, melt it without further help and shape it into the form she wanted caused Roland to sigh in wonder.

If he hadn't been able to employ a witch, Roland thought, achieving his production program would be delayed by more than a decade.

Two days later, the first simple milling machine appeared in the backyard.

This time Roland wasn't idle, drawing the gears could be regarded as his job. He designed a set of gears to be used for speed control and stabilizing the steam output. The corresponding tooth plate's design was already normed, and Roland could only wait until the milling machine was completely assembled before they could start with the production of the gears.

Using gears wasn't a new thing, most of the mines in this world used a winch mechanism to drain the water, which was built out of

wooden gears and pulled by animals. The Chief Knight finally felt satisfied – last time, His Highness had done so many unfathomable things, but this time he could understand what the Prince tried to achieve.

Roland also gathered three blacksmiths with their apprentices, who would learn how to use the milling machine together. After all, he could not personally operate the machine every day, so it was necessary to train a group of professional workers.

After everyone respectfully bowed, Roland began to demonstrate how to use the milling machine to process the gears.

Roland didn't mind acting as a teacher in front of everyone. In fact, what else could one do in this era? Plus, while doing this, there was no one who could criticize his manners, so he could operate the machine without any pressure.

The Chief Knight was in charge of pouring hot lard into the machine as lubrication – naturally in this age there were no oil lubricants. Replacing it with lard was a bit of a waste, but it was still better than nothing. After drenching the disc, the lard would fall into a pot which was placed under the machine. With this, the lard could be reused several times.

Roland first placed the lower milling stone in accordance with the design he had engraved beforehand. Then, he set the tooth gear above it so that the tooth gear, the milling stone, and a wooden wheel were in one line. The wooden wheel was driven by a pedal and its power was transmitted to the lower millstone by a leather belt.

Then, he put his hands down to gently stabilize the disc handle, until the lower millstone and the slowly-moving tooth gear were at a 90° angle.

Because the material of the tooth disc was iron and the lower millstone was out of steel, cutting out the teeth marks was not very difficult. Due to the hot lard the yard was soon filled with a tasty smell, but because the blacksmiths and their apprentices hadn't had meat in a long time, they had to swallow their saliva when smelling it.

After the demonstration, the contract was soon signed. Border Town's commerce was still in the initial phase, but calling it an industry was out of the question. No matter if it were the steam engine or the lathe, there would be no phenomenon where the people would run to the store, striving to be first or fearing to be the last to buy them. In this day and age, most people were not aware of the enormous significance they represented, as well as the potential commercial value they possessed. As such, Roland could only take the initiative to promote the use of these machines.

Roland specifically wrote in the contract that the blacksmiths who used the milling machine were required to process at least one set of gears each week. The required materials would be provided by the castle and the processing cost was set at 10 silver royals. At the same time, the blacksmiths had to pay a weekly fee of 2 gold royals. The milling machine was not given to them for use free of charge, but was rented out to them instead.

After entering the Months of the Demons, the blacksmiths would

usually have a lot less to do. So, this time when they had the chance to make money and it was even under an order from His Highness, there was naturally no blacksmith who had any objections. Meanwhile, Roland told them that this was only the first milling machine. In the future he would produce several, one after another, and if they were interested in one, they could apply for it in the Town Hall.

“Your Highness, why didn’t you directly write a processing fee of 8 silver royals in the contract?” asked Carter, puzzled, after the blacksmiths had left the backyard.

“Although these two figures are the same, they don’t contain the same meaning,” Roland explained, “This is probably Border Town’s first commercial leasing contract, so I had to set an industry norm.”

The Chief Knight rubbed his forehead. The 4th Prince seemed to be talking rubbish once more, but Carter was already used to it. As long as he pretended to listen carefully, His Highness would continue to explain it.

“A good beginning is always important in order to form a virtuous circle. I am the only one who currently needs to buy the gears, so I have to provide the tools while they provide the manpower. They will also get paid. In the future when there are others who have a demand for gears, they will realize that having their own tools will be better than renting the machine and earning the remuneration provided.” When Roland spoke up to here, he paused for a moment and then said, “In this way, when they see something new, they can first rent the machine and decide

later if the market is big enough for buying their own machine, and if not they will just continue renting the machine. This is a virtuous circle.”

Chapter 48 - Assembly

While Roland, full of interest, was talking about implementing a fair trading system, the sound of distant horns could be heard!

The patrol team would only blow the horn in the case that they couldn't cope with the current situation, alerting the town to assemble soldiers.

Roland and Carter looked at each other surprised, and then immediately walked out of the castle backyard, where the guards already had already prepared horses. Roland directly mounted his horse and rode with Carter and his men in the direction of the walls.

When they arrived at the wall, they saw that all members of the militia had already climbed up the wall and had taken their places, setting up a forest of pikes. Seeing this gave Roland a feeling of relief – the eggs hadn't been a waste after all.

Looking North-West, Roland could see a group of black shadows approaching Border Town. He reckoned that their numbers were over twenty.

Iron Axe left his defending position and trotted over. After giving a salute he said, “Your Highness, this group of demonic beasts nearing us seem to be slightly strange.”

“Strange? Are you saying that they would normally not act as a group?”

“That’s not it,” Iron Axe explained, “if they were to pack animals before the fall, then they would still retain that habit – such as the wolf species. But this kind of species doesn’t belong to this kind, they normally wouldn’t act this way, they seem to be on a mission. Earlier the hunters had already seen the beasts killing each other.”

The demonic beasts were only a mutation of their former kind, their actions would mostly be similar to their original habits, but at the same time their desires would become stronger. In a sense, the intelligence of a demonic beast was lower than that of a wild animal, because of their manic temper they even crossed dangerous areas that they would normally never cross.

Roland carefully observed the group of demonic beasts. He could see really big and small beasts and could distinguish at least two different kind of beasts, one kind wolf and the other bison. Species which would normally kill each other had suddenly learnt that they had to work together to accomplish something.

Because they still had to pass through some obstacles and traps set up by Iron Axe, they slowly crowded together in front of the center of the city wall.

Van’er felt his hands become damp with sweat, his grip holding the pike had become somewhat slippery. Taking advantage of the fact that no one was looking at him, he secretly wiped his hands on his clothes.

The Hunter Captain repeatedly said, “You have to relax; take

deep breaths.” Van’er repeatedly tried to do this but still could not stop his accelerated heartbeat. He had already lived in the West for more than a decade, and he had always heard of the evil doings of the demonic beasts. Since the beginning of the Months of the Demons, the occasionally arriving demonic beasts were all shot down by the hunter squads, so he slowly lost his fear of the demonic beasts. He even thought of himself as a brave and battle-hardened soldier, but today, facing so many demonic beasts for the first time, Van’er’s legs still trembled.

He reminded himself that he was chosen by His Highness as a vice captain, so Van’er tried to show a calm appearance, and kept the defense position.

The group of demonic beasts was now close enough that he could make out their appearances. Running in the front was one demonic beast of the bison species. On its head it had two arm-thick horns, it looked just like a black ram. The hair growing on its back seemed to cover it tightly like a cloak. When it was only thirty feet away from the wall, Van’er could feel the ground trembling. He licked his dry lips, and waited for the Captain to issue the command to thrust.

Then a loud bang could be heard.

The bison demonic beast actually didn’t reduce its speed, but hit its head straight against the wall, totally crushing its head and splashing black blood everywhere, painting the wall black.

Van’er didn’t even have the time to breathe, the bison was immediately followed by two wolves which jumped up off of the

dead bison's back.

“Thrust out!”

Hearing the Captain's command, Van'er subconsciously thrust out with his pike – even though the wolf species wasn't rushing toward him. The effect of this thrust was clearly not as good as their thrusts during their training. Some thrust their pikes many times in succession, and some people who saw the wolves jump thrust their pikes only once, while others did not react for a long time even after hearing the command.

As a result, only one wolf was driven back and the other jumped through a gap in the pike forest and landed on the wall.

“Keep the formation!” yelled the Captain once more.

Although Van'er would have liked to turn into a bird and look at the situation where the wolf had jumped on the wall, Iron Axe had emphasized many times during their training that when something broke through and came behind the front row, taking their attention, the front would turn into the most dangerous area. So he stared straight at the next group of attacking beasts with his eyes, and gripped the pike as strongly as he could.

The elite hunter squad was clearly better trained than the normal militia.

Even before the wolf had landed, the hunters had already pulled

out their cutlasses. Iron Axe was the quickest of all. He jumped directly in front of the wolf, only one step away, raised the butt of his gun, and firmly smashed it on the wolf's waist, hitting the wolf when it was still in the air so that it span many times in the air.

Whether it was the strength or the defense, after the demonic beasts' mutation both were significantly improved. Such an attack clearly had not caused too much damage to it. The wolf could still stand up immediately after its crash, and bare its sharp teeth.

Unfortunately for the wolf, Iron Axe's muzzle had already arrived at its head.

Bang! – the demonic beast's skull exploded and its brain matter flew everywhere. Without its brain, the wolf took one frail step backwards and collapsed while twitching.

“The beast is dead, continue to hold your positions!”

“My stomach ah -!” Someone loudly screamed in despair.

Van'er could see it in his peripheral vision. He saw a comrade leaning against the wall, tightly clutching his stomach, with blood-stained hands.

“His intestines are flowing out.”

“The other wolf had rushed the wall up again and had clawed directly at him!”

“Help me ...”

“Damn, someone take out some cloth to press down on the wound!”

It was a chaotic scene, other demonic beasts, like a wild boar, also rushed towards the wall. Despite its rough skin and flesh, the boar was so close that it had become a hedgehog due to the crossbow arrows shot by the hunters.

“Everybody don’t panic!” Roland thought, If Nightingale were here, she could have saved them from some trouble. Then he shouted, “Have you already forgotten what you learned during your training? How do you treat injured people? Handle it according the regulations!”

Hearing the prince’s shout, Van’er immediately woke up and remembered his duty. As a Vice Captain responsible for a segment of the wall’s defense he was responsible for organizing a rescue whenever someone was injured.

He ordered two of his subordinates, “You two, hurry and carry him towards the medical center, quickly!”

According to their previous experiences, the subordinates belived that this person would not survive. However, His Royal Highness had once said, it’s one thing to do something and not be successful, but doing nothing is forbidden! As a Vice Captain of the militia, Van’er needed to give priority to the implementation of orders and

regulations.

When the wounded comrade was carried away, order was finally restored on the wall. This wave of demonic beasts was seemingly large, but only a few could threaten the members of the militia on the wall.

The hunters shot the rest of the demonic beasts down one by one. Seeing this, Van'er could finally breathe relieved. Even though the whole battle had only lasted half an hour, he felt empty, and had no strength left.

However, at this moment, the person responsible for lookout of the demonic beasts shouted again, "My God, what is that ...?!"

Van'er could also see the new beasts.

Although it was still a long distance away from the wall, its outline was still clearly visible. This beast was really a monster! Van'er swore, even if ten oxen were piled up in front of this monster, they couldn't compare.

Only the experienced Iron Axe could immediately identify the newcomer.

He had to take a deep breath to calm himself down. There was no doubt that this was a hybrid species, the militia was in trouble.

Chapter 49 - Mixed Species

Roland rubbed his eyes in disbelief, what the hell was this? Was this still within the scope of the biological variability of a demonic beast? What he saw was hard to describe with words, even monsters in horror films were not this absurd.

From afar, it looked like a giant turtle with two heads, but from close up, it was actually two wolf heads.

Roland thought, was this a test specimen from Dr. Frankenstein? It was almost as tall as the city walls, its body was 7 yards long, and it had a total of six legs which were stumpy and shaped like a rhinoceros' legs. However, one foot was the size of at least one adult torso. The head ... unlike the two-headed monsters in various monster films, they weren't yelling at each other, biting each other, or trying to show who was the boss. Instead, they were just hanging down, and their eyes had a wooden glaze . It was like a zombie which was brainlessly moving forward.

However, the demonic beast's most striking feature was the shell on its back. The shell's surface was dark-brown and covered with algae, and it had a special hardness. It was just like a turtle shell, covering the turtle from the front to the back. If this monster could also shrink back into its shell like a turtle, it would be really hard to get rid of it.

However, Roland didn't worry, a demonic beast this big had to be slow, so it was destined to be a target. Even if the firearms couldn't penetrate its shell, it was still possible to shoot the heads that were sticking out. If it intended to hide in its shell, then they would

have to turn it upside down with explosives.

“Your Highness, this is a hybrid species,” Iron Axe nervously leaned over and explained, “Now I can understand why the demonic beasts of different species work together. They seem to be under the control of the hybrid demonic beast.”

So it was like a lion which commanded sheep? Roland nodded. “So this is a completely different beast than the one you met last time?”

“It is also my first time seeing this kind of hybrid species. Although it looks bizzare, you can’t get careless. As long as it’s a mixed species, it will always be hard to deal with it.”

“It will soon enter the range of our archers, so try to first kill it with bows and crossbows.” ordered Roland.

At this moment, since it was still lightly snowing and a strong wind was blowing from the North, the weather wasn’t suitable for archery. However, two hunters of Iron Axe’s personal squad were still confident that they could kill the beast.

They climbed up the watchtower, tested the wind and then fired their arrows into the air.

The two arrows seemed like they had grown eyes. They rose to the highest point and then, under the influence of wind and gravity, fell at an almost vertical angle onto their target.

Just as envisioned, the arrows bounced off the shell. In Roland's brain it even sounded like a ricochet.

Seeing this, the hunters hurriedly inserted their next arrow on their strings, and let loose a second wave.

Finally, this volley received a result. This time, the impact area was in the front part of the monster, so one arrow precisely entered into the head of a wolf while the other arrow was entered the neck of the other head.

However, the demonic beasts didn't roar in anger or speed up its charge, it just stopped for a short pause, tucked its head into its shell and then continued to slowly move forward.

This change left everyone stunned.

With this the demonic beasts just looked like a tank, its body was as low as possible above the ground so that even a better shooter wouldn't be able to land an arrow.

"Take your guns," Roland ordered.

Now, the target was only fifty feet away from the wall. Even if the guns weren't carved rifled flintlocks, he didn't worry that they would miss.

Carter and Iron Axe immediately went near the edge of the wall, laid the barrels of their guns on the horizontal frame of the wall, aimed, and fired.

While a burst of white smoke was drifting away from the rifles, Roland could clearly see the bullet hitting the shell and splitting away some debris, even opening a small hole within the shell. However, the mixed species seemed to be unaffected, as it continued to maintain its original speed.

It seemed that this layer of armor belonged to the strength category of biological carbon's intensity, thought Roland. Unfortunately, the lead balls were still too soft, so they were easily deformed and were not suitable to penetrate thick armor. So, those four rifles alone to break the mixed species' armor was quite unrealistic, so the only option left was to use explosives.

Iron Axe agreed with the Prince's judgement, he immediately ordered his deputy to get the explosives as fast as possible, because the demonic beast had already reached the walls. They didn't feel the earth tremble like it did when the demonic beast stomped toward the wall.. Instead, it unexpectedly began to smash its shell against the wall again and again, just like a high-frequency rotary hammer. Suddenly, stone chips began to fly everywhere and a number of cracks spread along the bound cement at a rapid speed.

Rough walls were highly resistant to compression, but the tensile and shear resistance performance of the walls were very poor. That meant that the wall's ability to withstand the shock of vibration was almost zero. The people standing on the walls could feel a strong vibration, and soon, a shrill sound of friction was

delivered to the ears of all the people standing on the wall. With this, the wall had begun to give up under the mixed species' attack.

However, its impact hadn't stopped. Instead, it started to move again, and soon the whole front half of the beast's body was embedded into the walls.

The militia standing on the part of the wall with the cracks had already fled, and the invisible Nightingale grabbed Roland by his waist and jumped down with him from the top of the wall – if at this moment someone was staring at the prince, he would see the prince's feet hanging above the floor, just like a ghost.

When Van'er arrived carefully carrying a package of explosives, he was surprised to see that there was already a nine foot-wide hole within the wall, and the demonic beast had already stepped through the wall but was still maintaining its previous speed of slowly moving forwards.

“Hurry!” Iron Axe shouted, “light it and put it at the foot of the demonic beast!”

Although Van'er's hand were shaking, his mind unexpectedly became clear and every detail of his training with the explosives emerged within his mind. It was a different version of explosives than used during the training. To reduce costs, the explosive was now placed inside a wooden box filled with debris from the mine. At the same time, the ignition design was also optimized, it used a flint and copper wire type ignition. If this failed, the kit also contained normal ignition leads. He hurried to tear away the oilcloth and opened the bag, where he then got to see a copper

string. When he exhausted all of his body's strength to pull the string, he could hear a sizzling sound coming out from the box and white smoke began to rise up – this was the sign of a successful ignition.

To slow down the burning time, the lead wire was soaked in salt, only needing the time of 10 breaths to explode. When Van'er saw white smoke rising up from the box, his world turned quiet around him. He had already witnessed the power of this thing, if it exploded in his hands, he was afraid that not even any pieces of his own body would be left.

Nine breaths.

Van'er could hear his own heartbeat, as if it wanted to give him a countdown. Step by step, he went in front of the demonic beast, placing explosives under the beast.

Five breaths.

Now that it had built up so much pressure, nothing could stop the explosion now.

Three breaths.

Van'er turned and ran.

Two breaths.

Once breaths – he could only hear a muffled sound. Van'er felt the shockwave and the world became noisy again.

He turned around and could see a lot of white blasted up from under the shell – that was the snow shot into the air from the explosives, at first glance it looked like a diffused misty flower. The demonic beast finally stopped, but before it fell, it crashed into the ground, as if it couldn't afford to hold up its heavy carapace any longer. Then, black blood surged out from under the carapace, soaking the ground around it.

“Oh oh oh -!”

Seeing this, the crowd suddenly burst out in cheers.

Van'er fell down to the ground, only now discovering that his clothes were soaked with sweat.

It was finally over.

When everyone thought this, the sound of the horn resounded throughout Border Town again.

Once more, a horde of demonic beasts was marching toward Border Town, trying to destroy it.

Chapter 50 - Wall Of Flames

“Do you feel better now?”

Anna patted Nana on her back to comfort her. Anna’s stomach was also turned upside down, but in the end she was still able to swallow it down.

When the wounded man was carried in, he was still conscious and was constantly repeating, “Help me, help me ...” seeing the expression of despair and begging within his eyes left the people around him feeling heartbroken. Seeing the man’s intestines hanging outside from his belly, Nana couldn’t hold back and threw up.

Even so, she still insisted on treating him. After placing the intestines back into the belly of the patient, Nana laid her hands above the wound, closed her eyes and began to heal the patient’s wounds.

“Ah ...” After the healing Nana let out an exhausted sigh, leaned against Anna’s shoulder and whispered, “Today was the first time that the horn was blown, do you think that His Highness is alright?”

“I do not know,” Anna shook her head, she wanted to go over there to see the situation at the walls with her own eyes, afraid that Roland could be in trouble. She was even a little envious of Nightingale, her ability to act without being noticed was very convenient.

At this moment, a booming sound could be heard from the direction of the wall and everyone could feel the earth slightly trembling.

Brian jumped off from the bed he was sitting on and began walking somewhat restlessly through the room.

“Young man, you have to relax.” said Sir Pine, while calmly wiping his sword, “A knight isn’t allowed to lose his cool before he enters a battle, this will only make bad things worse. Moreover, this situation is still far from bad.”

“I’m very sorry, Sir,” replied Brian, ashamed, “I just thought that there had to be a desperate battle on the wall, but I’m here, wasting my time, so I find it difficult to feel at ease. After all, it is my duty to defend the town.”

“Perhaps.” Sir Pine shrugged his shoulders, “But it’s not your responsibility to guard the town. After you heard that His Highness will canonize you as a knight after winter, you should first understand that the first principle of the Knight is allegiance. Now, he needs you to protect Anna, so now your responsibility is here. “

“You ... when you put it like this,” for a moment Brian hesitated but then he seated himself on the bed again.

But soon they heard the horn blow a second time – it was even more rapid than the first time. It just felt like thunder would roll

over everyone's heart.

Sir Pine frowned.

“Anna!” Exclaimed Nana, shocked.

Sir Pine turned around and saw that the witch was running directly toward the door. Brian immediately went to catch up with her, placing himself in front of her.

“You said you want to guard the walls? Now is your time,” said Anna in a calm and autocratic voice, “as long as you follow me on my way to the wall, you will not be contradicting His Royal Highness' command.”

Hearing this, Brian was really shocked, but he raised his head to look quizzically toward Sir Pine.

What an amazing girl, thought the Baron, there was nothing wrong with what she said. In addition, His Highness does not require her to stay in the medical school. He had also heard from Nana that Anna could summon flames. So if the current situation was really tight, letting a witch join the battle would maybe be the deciding factor in reversing the situation.

Coming to this conclusion, he nodded, “Protect her well!”

“Yes Sir!” Brian yelled loudly and suddenly felt his blood burning.

Seeing the two leave, Nana asked, “Father, will you not go with them?”

“My battle is here, at your side, my good girl,” said the Baron with a smile, “Whether it be the demonic beasts or the devil himself, I will never let any of them hurt you!”

The distance between the Medical Center and the wall wasn’t far, so Anna and Brian could trot all the way along the stone path toward the east wall. When the two were finally close enough to see the outline of the wall around the central watchtower, they saw that the situation has become very problematic.

A great hole was opened within the wall. Roland was being shielded by his personal guards, but several people were still on their way down. A demonic beast shaped like a bear came sprinting towards the militia. It was unstoppable, and when it hit the soldiers stationed at the front they were all sent flying.

When someone saw Anna with her strange attire running towards them the person yelled at her, “Hey, it’s dangerous here, you have to leave immediately!”

Anna turned a deaf ear towards him and went directly towards the hole instead. After the demonic beast had fought its way through the militia, it turned around and rushed towards Anna. Brian stepped beside Anna, ready to protect her. He lowered his body and slashed out with his sword – but the crazy demonic beast had no intention to dodge, and hit the edge of the sword with its

front legs. The sword was immediately sent flying, but at the same time, the momentum was so strong that the beast's front legs were cut open, and were even broken.

It rolled around on the ground, screaming and looking like a dehydrated fish that was struggling to breathe. No one dared to come near it because they were afraid of getting hit. However, Anna walked beside the demonic beast, put both of her hands on the ground, and suddenly the demonic beast burst into flames. The beast turned into a ball of coal.

When flames suddenly erupted within the crowd, Roland saw that Anna personally had come. He was immediately bathed in cold sweat.

I hadn't planned for you to show yourself like this!

He had originally intended to let Nana lay down the groundwork. After most people had accepted the presence of a witch, he had planned to announce Anna's presence in public.

However, now every previously made plan was destroyed, so he immediately turned and said, "Don't worry about me, go and protect her!"

Anna must not be lost. She was an important figure in the industrial development of his town, so if she were injured it would bring an immeasurable loss.

“I know,” said Nightingale, “But please also pay attention to your own safety.”

Anna went to the front walls with the fracture. When Roland’s guards saw the girl in strange clothes coming towards them, they immediately stepped aside and let her through. Now, she stood among the soldiers, and spread her arms wide to shield them. Sending vines of flame from her hands, she let them climb up the wall along the destroyed section.

Everyone’s mouths were gaping open when they saw this scene. They dared not to believe their eyes when they saw a wall of flames rising up and slowly filling the gap in the wall. This wasn’t an illusion. All of the guards had to step back because of the high temperature. The surrounding snow was rapidly melting, and formed clouds of white mist which then rose up.

The demonic beasts also feared the flames. They immediately fled to the sides, and only occasionally one or two of them would try to break through the wall of fire, but no demonic beasts could step through the wall of flames.

“Everyone get back on the walls!” Roland loudly shouted, trying to grasp the opportunity, “Get back into the formation! Hunter squad, fire at will!”

Then, he himself grabbed Carter’s gun, laid it on the wall, and began to shoot down the demonic beasts.

Seeing the Prince himself attack motivated all the people present.

After all, in this age, seeing nobility or the Royal Family taking the lead role and fighting alongside the militia was seldom seen, so seeing this greatly enhanced the morale.

The crowd began to chant the slogan, “Guard Border Town! Fight for the Prince!” while at the same time maintaining the line of the defense and holding their formation.

The fighting continued until the sky began to get dark. Only then were all the demonic beasts in front of the wall killed.

Slowly, the wall of flames began to disperse and Anna, totally exhausted, wiped the sweat off her forehead.

Then, Roland saw an incredible scene.

Roland’s personal guards laid their fists on their heart, and bowed in the direction of Anna. Then the militia, as if they were infected by the mood of the guards, also gave their salute. Incredibly, no one shouted or cursed her with evil words, they only watched her silently. After the war, all of Border Town was quiet.

Seeing a kind of incredible power which was never seen before for the first time was indeed terrifying, but this power was used in their favor. When seeing it used for the confrontation with their greatest enemies, their fear gradually disappeared, replaced by trust and gratitude.

Roland’s heart went crazy while walking towards Anna, but

when he was by her side he found her totally pale. She was walking unsteadily, and was on the verge of collapsing.

“Are you okay?” He worriedly asked her and held her by her shoulder. Anna saw the Prince safe, gave him a forced smile, and then fell down in his arms.

2nd Saga - Months of the Demon

Chapter 51 - Her Majesty The Queen

Sunlight fell through a narrow window into the room and was reflected as dark red stripes on the wall.

There were only a few places within the Kingdom where you could still see the sun, and the Port of Clear Water was one of them. In this place, the Months of the Demons, with its cold wind and strong snowfall, only had a tiny bit of influence. With the exception that the Blacksail-Fleet couldn't leave the harbor, the entire city was still as busy as usual.

The city governor and harbor master Garcia Wimbleton was sitting at her square table under the window, seriously studying the contents of a letter. Her gray hair was caught in the sunset and had a golden touch. Her face produced shadows from the light, adding definition to her facial features and , giving her a unique charm full of heroic spirit.

Ryan had been standing by her side for quite a while.

Although she had already exceeded her usual time for reading a letter of this length, he still chose to wait quietly for a little longer – he didn't want to interrupt the silence.

Eventually, Garcia sighed softly, put the letter down, and then told him, “My father is dead.”

Hearing this, Ryan was startled, and he had to ask, “What?”

“My father, Ali Wimbledon, King of Graycastle.”

She rarely repeated anything she said, he thought, because when he usually asked her again, she would merely look at him like he hadn't said anything. However, she really wasn't kidding, right? The king is really dead?

“...” Ryan opened his mouth, trying to say some comforting words, but in the end he just asked, “How did he die?”

Fortunately, she didn't care about this – she was the daughter of the King, the Governor of the Port of Clear Water, and the Commander of the Blacksail Fleet, she didn't need anyone to comfort her, “The letter says that my brother Gerald killed my father, but he was caught by the guards. He didn't commit suicide to escape punishment, so in the end he was put to trial by several ministers, there he was sentenced to death by beheading.”

“That doesn't sound right,” Ryan subconsciously couldn't believe it.

“Of course that isn't the truth,” said Garcia, expressionless, “It's true that my first brother is a relatively stupid man, but he isn't so foolish to go on a suicide mission. If no one led him in that direction, he would never do such a thing.”

“Someone framed him?” asked Ryan.

“Let me guess ...” The 3rd Princess closed her eyes and thought for a moment before she answered, “Someone probably put this detailed plan in order, and tempted Gerald by saying that they would help him – bringing people into my father’s courtyard. This must have been arranged by someone in advance, including the eradication, exchange and bribing of the guards. But those aren’t areas where Gerald has his strong points, since he is just too lazy to arrange something like this. The rest would be simple, it was only important to acquire a person who had Gerald’s trust, but would still betray him in the end.”

Ryan could add nothing. After all, these were only guesses. What truly happened was not important, the important part was only the result. He believed that this was also the thought of the 3rd Princess.

Sure enough, Garcia opened her eyes and continued, “I am 90% sure that it wasn’t the 1st Prince, he was a person who only knew brute force. His brain is one big muscle so it was regular that he was fooled. Only ... “when saying this, her voice had some spunk,” my 2nd brother would be this cruel. “

“You mean Timothy Wimbledon was the true culprit?”

“Apart from him, who else would know so much about Gerald? Also after this matter, he is the person with the greatest gains.” while speaking, Garcia was unconsciously tapping her finger on the table, “Even a blind person can see this! But he was father’s favorite, so he really didn’t need to do this!”

Her Highness was truly angry, Ryan realized. Seeing the Princess

this heated up was truly rare. It seems that even though she had been complaining that her father was too eccentric, in the end she still didn't want to see her father dying like this.

Ryan was able to understand this feeling, more or less. In a large family, the younger generation would always have such a feeling towards the master of the house – a mountain they would have to surpass, both revering and hating him. If she was right and this was truly planned by the second prince, then his actions could indeed be considered bloody and cruel.

“But he ... Why would he do this?”

“Because he was afraid of me,” Garcia took a deep breath, trying to control her emotions, “he is afraid of my Blacksail Fleet.”

Realizing that Ryan wouldn't answer, she continued to explain, “Timothy seems to have a spy in our city, which in itself isn't surprising, I myself also have arranged eyes and ears in Valencia. When he discovered the existence of my Blacksail Fleet it became easy for him to imagine what I would do later. Valencia isn't able to support an army that is capable of facing my fleet. So, he came to the conclusion to use Gerald as bait to get what he wanted.”

“So you mean, he wants an army?”

“He wants the throne,” said Garcia, “With my father's death and now even Gerald's death, he has become the first heir. I am afraid that he will press the ministers to crown him as fast as possible. Only when he becomes Wimbledon IV will he be able to mobilize

all his vassals with their armies. “As she said this she shook her head, “However, as I have already said, as father’s favorite son he really didn’t need to do this!”

“Wouldn’t that be worse?” asked Ryan, worried, “If your 2nd brother gets crowned, won’t he declare the battle for the throne finished and call you and your siblings back? What will you do then?”

Garcia answered as if she felt it was completely beneath her dignity, “This step would be too straightforward, just because he was our father’s favorite son, it doesn’t mean that he will have the support of the ministers, especially because of his move to kill the former king – although he pushed the murder on Gerald and may be able to fool the civilians, I estimate that it will take a long time until he will be able to grasp full authority in Graycastle. So ... “she looked cunningly at Ryan and said,” I have to change my plan a little. “

Ryan immediately fell on one knee and said, “I’m willing to serve.”

Garcia stood up, walked to the window and spoke to Ryan with her back to him, “The first thing he is bound to do after he claims the throne is to deal with me. However, his only possibility to pressure me is to command Joe Kohl, the Duke of the Southern territory. I estimate that the latter will use the king’s mourning period to delay sending out his troops – that old fox has always been reluctant to do business where he would make a loss. At most he will summon his feudatories and send them out to surround Port of Clear Water. “Garcia paused slightly and then spoke

further, “However, this move will give us unnecessary trouble, so we will set sail tomorrow. “

“Sail? Your Highness, don’t tell me you want to ...”

“Eagle City lies more inland and is almost undefended. We can reach the Town of Clear Spring by using the tributary of the Sanwan River, from there we will only need one day to arrive at Eagle City. After we seize Eagle City, the entire Southern territory will be under my control. The situation, after Timothy claims the throne, will be different than what he thinks it will be. When Timothy wants to know the Duke’s progress but discovers that the whole South is under my control, I really want to see his face.”

“But, you also said that Wimbledon III just passed away, and following this -“

“What, do I need to shed some tears first?” Garcia turned around, the light of the sunset fell on her body and covered her with a red veil. Her face was hidden in the dark, only her eyes were reflected by the light. The emotion shown within her eyes was as solid as a boulder, Ryan thought. Even if she is angry or feeling regret, she will never show sorrow.

Showing sorrow wouldn’t be suitable for a King or Queen.

“No, you don’t need to do that,” Ryan seriously said.

Garcia nodded with satisfaction, “Go and tell the Captain that I

want to speak him. Since Timothy was unwilling to wait until the end of the five years, I will not let him down. After I conquer Eagle City, I will declare the independence of the Southern Territory.”

All this didn't matter to himself, he thought, Garcia will always find a solution for every possibility. Once she decides on a path for herself, she will walk down the path courageously. This was where her charm laid and was one of the reasons why he followed her.

“Yes, Your Highness ... no,” Ryan corrected himself, “Your Majesty.”

Chapter 52 - Heart Of Fire (Part 1)

Roland knocked on the door, and when he heard Nightingale's response he entered the room.

The windows in the room were closed and had thick curtains. They were only open during the early morning and evening to let in fresh air. At any other time the windows were closed to keep the room warm.

The only light in the room came from two candles at the end of the bed. The candles burned quietly and threw out many crisscrossing shadows throughout the room.

Roland went towards the bed. Seeing that the woman resting on the soft pillows and bedding still had her eyes closed, he sighed softly.

"Is Border Town's defense still holding?" asked Nightingale while coming over to Roland and handing him a cup of tea.

"At the moment everything is going smoothly," answered Roland while taking a small sip, but then he gave her the cup back, "From that day on, a big group of demonic beasts like last time hasn't attacked us. Also, all of our injured members of the militia are now healed and back, ready to fight. Their fighting passion has become ... somewhat high."

"What is with the damaged part of the city wall?"

“Karl rolled logs under the carapace of the mixed beast to move it towards the hole in the wall. There, he will use a capstan to get it up and use a wooden frame to hold it upright, making it a part of the city wall,” Roland knew that Nightingale was trying to distract him by questioning him, so that he wouldn’t worry himself too much. However, when he stepped into the room, all his attention would always stay on the woman who was lying in bed.

If we say that the last time we confronted the large scale invasion we obtained a victory worthy of pride, there is no doubt that the biggest contributor for the victory was Anna. If she hadn’t used her wall of flames to block the gap in the wall, the consequences would really have been unthinkable.

However, she hadn’t woken up since she fainted in his arms.

“It has already been one week,” whispered Roland.

Theoretically, if a person laid in a coma for one week without food or water, with no possibility of supplying her with nutrition through external measures ,such as injection, the body’s functions will shut down and the brain will gradually go into shock and die. However, Anna did not have any signs of poor health – in fact her appearance now was better than when she fell into Roland’s arms. Her cheeks were rosy, her breathing was smooth, and when Roland put his hand on her forehead he could feel that she had a normal temperature. Everything showed that Anna was at full health, but ... she wouldn’t wake up.

“This is also the first time I have encountered such a situation,” Nightingale stood at Roland’s side, shaking her head while explaining, “She depleted all her magic within her body, but now her magic power is already at the point of saturation, even more rich than it has been in the past. If I did not calculate it wrong, today at midnight will be her day of adulthood.”

“Do you mean she’s going to be an adult while in a coma?”

“No, she will die while in a coma,” Nightingale said bluntly, “You must use your will to overcome the suffering on your day of adulthood. If your resistance is broken, the bite of the witch’s magic power will irreversibly destroy her body.”

Roland moved a chair next to the bed and sat down, “I remember that you once said that when facing magic backlash, no matter how painful it becomes, you will always stay conscious and clear-headed. Either you will be able to cross this hurdle or you will choose to terminate your life.”

“Indeed, it is exactly like this. Within the Witch Cooperation Association we also had someone who believed to draw support from being unconscious when passing through the bite of the evil spirit ... only having to bear the torment once a year,” Nightingale hesitated but then continued, “she said that she relied on alchemic substances to sleep, but in the end it was meaningless ... when the moment came she was immediately devoured by the magic without any chance to resist.”

“The pain does not slowly increase?”

“No. When your time arrives, the pain will strike you just like lightning, but how long you have to resist varies from person to person. My sister was not strong enough, but ...” she trailed off.

Roland understood what she meant, not knowing how long they had to suffer the pain was already a kind of torture in itself, not knowing how long they have to resist – it was similar to being on an abandoned ship in the middle of a heavy storm. It would be easy to let people give up the desire to live on.

During the moment of silence, Roland felt a hand on his shoulder.

“During my homeless and miserable years, I had seen too much death. I saw witches being treated like cattle, hanged, burned, or tortured to death just for the entertainment of the nobility. The only way for a witch to survive was to live far away from other humans, living a cloistered life. I do not know where the Holy Mountain is located, but in our hearts it is an unattainable paradise.” Nightingale’s voice became softer than it had ever been in the past. “but Anna is different. In addition to the help we sisters can give her, I have never seen someone else being so concerned about a witch as you. She is needed by people, she is valued and treated like a normal person ... Your Highness, Anna has not even made it through her adulthood yet, but she has already found her Holy Mountain.”

However, this was not the outcome Roland had hoped for. He closed his eyes, and recalled the scene when he had meet her.

She was barefoot, and was only wearing tattered clothes. She had been living in a cage, but there was not the slightest hint of fear in her face. Her eyes resembled an unpolluted lake surface, clear and calm.

She was the flame, but she wasn't flickering like a flame.

Memories began to appear like the pictures on a film reel.

"I have satisfied your curiosity, Sir, so can you kill me now?"

"I have never used my power to hurt someone else."

"I just want to stay near you, Your Highness, nothing more."

"The Demon's Bite will never kill me, I will beat it."

"Are you dreaming? I'm not going anywhere."

.....

Roland had to restrain his surging thoughts and whispered, "I will stay here and accompany her until the last moment."

"I will also stay ... thank you."

After dinner, when Nana heard that Anna would go through her

day of adulthood, she insisted on staying. Roland set aside a room for her and her father who would accompany her during the night.

Like this, Roland and the two witches were sitting besides the bed, quietly waiting for the approaching midnight hour.

Regarding Nightingale and Nana, they would also have to face the Demon's Bite this winter, but fortunately their magic awakened on different days. Otherwise, the three witches would have to suffer their test of life and death at the same time. Roland estimated that if that was the case he wouldn't be able to stay calm in the room.

The town had no clock tower, so with only the light of the candles, the passage of time became blurred. Cold wind blew against the window, so from time to time they could hear the screeching wind. When Roland felt a trace of weariness attack his heart, Nightingale suddenly said, "It has begun."

Only she could see the magic flow within Anna's body. She saw that it became restless, and the cluster of green flame became unusually rich, but the white incandescence in her center turned dark, while all of the irritable magic converged inward. It seemed to be pulled towards the center while struggling and rolling wildly, but it was of no use.

Roland couldn't see these changes, but he was also aware that something was wrong.

The candle flames began to shake, even though no wind was

blowing inside the room. The light emitted by the flames got darker, it seemed like all the shadows were swallowed by the flame as it changed its color – the orange-red glow turned into a jade-like green flame.

He looked at the woman lying on the bed, but she was still sleeping, without even the slightest changes on her face, as if all this had nothing to do with her.

At this point the flame of the candles almost disappeared – but the flame was not extinguished. The green flames were just like phagocytic cells eating up the orange flames, plunging everything into darkness.

But soon, the fire was lit up again. However, this time the flame of the candles had turned into a pure green. The three people sitting around the bed were submerged in green light, looking quizzically into each other's eyes, but in the end no one could understand what was happening.

However, at this moment, everyone's eyes turned towards the bed, they had heard Anna groaning.

Anna slowly opened her eyes.

“Anna ...” Roland was shocked, she woke up?

Anna blinked a few times to clear her eyes, but then she smiled at him, stretching out with the open palm of her right hand, reaching

for the Prince.

A mass of green fire was leaping up from her palm, quietly burning.

Roland didn't know why, but he could understand what Anna wanted. He hesitated for only a moment, but then he slowly inserted a finger into the flame. The anticipated burning sensation didn't come. Instead, it was just like being wrapped up in lukewarm water, it felt soft and warm.

Chapter 53 - Heart Of Fire (Part 2)

The day after Anna woke up, Roland and the others bid Nightingale farewell.

“Although the reason why is still unclear, but Anna is probably the first witch who has spent the day of awakening without pain,” Nightingale excitedly said before leaving. After Nightingale had followed Roland for a long time, she got used to the term ‘awakening’ when describing the transformation of witch. “When I come back, I will bring my sisters with me. At that time I hope you will accept us, just as you had accepted Anna.”

This would be exactly what Roland wished for. With only Anna’s ability he was able to revolutionize the forging process, allowing the town to see the dawn of the industrial age, so what would he be able to do with a bunch of witches? Of course, he also had to take into account safety issues, since crossing the mountains during the Months of the Demons was very dangerous.

But apparently, Nightingale was quite eager to bring her sisters back because she said, “During this winter, many of my sisters will have to face this difficult period. If I can bring them the news only a little earlier, I might be able to save at least some of my sisters. Rest assured, normally the demonic beasts aren’t able to find my whereabouts. “

Finally, Roland asked, “When do you have to face your day of awakening?”

Nightingale turned around and mounted her horse, “At the end of winter or early spring.” While leaving, Nightingale waved back towards the prince, “Do not worry about me, in the previous years the bite of the demons gotten lighter and lighter for me.”

This answer gave Roland something to think about.

He had already thought about how Anna could survive her day of awakening. After all, Anna said afterwards that she hadn’t felt any pain. This was completely against the Nightingale’s concept – “the power of Witches come from the devil, so the power is contaminated by evil.” This could be seen when their blood turned black and flowed out of every pore. Their skin would look burnt, leaving the body in a miserable condition. This was unshakable and irrefutable evidence.

However, since the beginning, Roland had thought this was wrong.

He rummaged through the memories of the old 4th Prince, but he didn’t find any proof that God or the Devil existed in this world. Since it isn’t a divine power, it shouldn’t be regarded as a standard to distinguish between good and evil. In fact, even if there were gods who would frequently interfere with the mortal world, it was still the believers who choose their own camp. Only then would the gods get their power, rather than vice versa.

According to the Nightingale’s description, a witch would gather the magic gathering within her body. However, when the magic had no way to be released, would it damage its own vessel? Roland thought that the possibility of this theory being right was very

high. After all, most people who were confronted with hostility and pressure would certainly choose to hide their own abilities, pretending to be normal while hoping to leave the battlefield alive. This would lead to the point where before they reached their adulthood they would rarely have the opportunity to use their magic.

Roland certainly did not think that his castle would block the Demon's Bite. He asked Anna if she had an unbearably painful experience before this. If anything was different during this year, then it was because she came to the castle and was able to use her magic almost every day.

So, with Nightingale's final answer his guess was confirmed – her stealth ability wasn't very noticeable, so she could even use it often. In addition, she had been forced into training her ability by other people and was forced to use her ability recklessly. Thus, the backfire of her magic power only had little impact on her.

When Roland were back in the Castle he immediately started Nana's enhanced training. If no one was injured while defending the town, she had to treat a variety of small animals. If he was able to confirm his theory with Nana's help, the significance for the witch community could be described as earth-shaking. The devil's curse would change into a present of the divine. As long as he could ensure that his territory was a safe haven for witches, endless masses of witches would come to Border Town.

He didn't know how, but after the last attack everything was back on track, without any big waves.

Roland began to intensify the production of his steam engine II, but also gave Anna enough time to get familiar with her new capabilities.

He built another shack in his backyard, but this time it was covered from the snow. It was used as an experimental area, since he still felt it was safer to build one in his own backyard.

Nightingale had previously said that witches, when reaching adulthood, would stabilize their magic power and probably produce new branch capabilities. However, until now he hadn't seen Anna show any new capabilities, but her control of fire, had become completely differently than before.

No, whether or not it could be called a flame was still a question ... Roland thought, the former flame was still in the range to understand with common sense, but now the green flame wasn't understandable with common sense.

He named it "Heart of Fire"

It could exist away from Anna but at the same time stay influenced by Anna's will, capable of changing its shape. Just as she was doing it right now – the Heart of Fire was burning on top of an iron panel two yards away from her, swaying lightly back and forth, as if it was saluting her. However, Roland knew that Anna was still controlling it. Normally, the Heart of Fire had a temperature close to one's body temperature, but when Anna wanted to heat it up, it would instantly raise its temperature to a comparatively higher temperature, changing its color from a jade-like green into darker green. Similarly, it could also turn into a big

cluster of flames from a small flame, or even change its movement speed.

Unfortunately, it couldn't be moved too far away from Anna. After repeated testing they discovered that when the flame moved more than five yards away from Anna, it would disappear.

Another new future of the Heart of Flame was that Anna could call more than one flame – but until now she had barely been able to operate the two flames simultaneously.

Even so, the situation at the wall was described as calm. The demonic beasts would still appear one after another outside the wall, but there was no presence of a mixed species. Without them it was nearly impossible for the demonic beasts to break through. Just like Roland had said, they became stronger and faster, but they were still just beasts. Due to the huge wall length, they had to direct the demonic beasts to the middle section of the wall, so that the militia with only two hundred members could hold the wall.

So in addition to his daily routine of patrolling his territory, Roland had plenty of time to spend on construction.

He had set aside a site south of the castle, and planned to use it as living area for the arriving witches. As the investor of the project, he appointed Karl as the head of the workers, building a batch of two-story brick houses. At the same time, a reasonable and beautiful layout was considered, allowing easy entrance and exit, and a good drainage system strove to create a well-planned neighborhood.

He also considered whether the witches would be distributed to the old areas or only the new urban areas, mixing them with the common inhabitants, but after thinking about it, he gave up the plan. Although this would help accelerate the acceptance of the witches by the normal people, before he could erase all the misunderstandings, the consequences were likely irreparable. After all, the witches only had a certain influence within the militia.

In addition, there was also no guarantee that the witches brought by Nightingale were harmless and behaved people – most of them had suffered the pain and suffering of the world, so Roland was afraid that the situation wouldn't be so easy to summarize. After all, all the witches couldn't be like Anna and Nana.

Also, when the witches lived in one area it would be convenient for collective management. Before they came, Roland had to draw up all the relevant rules and regulations. Until now, Roland had no experience he could refer to, after all, he had neither the personnel nor capacity of the National Security Agency, nor was he the creator of the avengers, who knew how to manage a group of people and had the abilities for it! He was without any better option than to press for a basic system used for personnel management by companies, slowly wading through the river by groping for stones.

Of course, Roland knew that this program had loopholes, but as a pioneer, what else could he do? Retracing his tail and only staying in Border Town could take decades to be able to touch the threshold of industrialization, but he wasn't a cultivator, so how could he wait for decades?

Wanting to lead this era into the next, being at the forefront of the reform, it was necessary to have a spirit of adventure.

Just when he was recording these thoughts on paper, Barov opened the door and walked in.

Shaking the snow of his coat and saluting the Prince, he informed him: “Your Highness, a messenger of Longsong Stronghold is coming.”

Chapter 54 - Bad News

Petrov didn't think that he would visit Border Town again so soon.

He had not intended to travel during the cold winter. In particular, he had not intended to leave his warm house when the demonic beasts were ravaging the countryside. However, when Duke Ryan personally gave him the mission to deliver this letter with hot news to the hands of the 4th Prince, he had no way to refuse.

He certainly knew the contents of the letter – in fact, the entire aristocracy in the Kingdom of Graycastle were discussing the amazing news: The King of Graycastle had fallen because of murder committed by his eldest son, Gerald Wimbleton. Immediately after the news spread, the 2nd Prince stepped forward, announcing that the Kingdom could not survive without a King. Since he was previously the second in line, he was now the heir and with this would then be the next King.

However, this behavior wasn't approved by everyone. It was said that the process of Gerald's trial was very strange, because during the whole interrogation, the Prince was only seen a few times, but he hadn't said a single word and his hands were tied tightly. So, most Ministers were hoping to look into the matter thoroughly before deciding who would inherit the throne.

It was also rumored that the second son Timothy Wimbleton played a self-guided drama, where he was the real killer and was only placating a sad look, but in truth couldn't wait to inherit the

throne.

In the end, the debate about the true culprit was meaningless. Since the 2nd Prince had the full support of the Imperial Prime Minister, he could temporarily take over the position of King, so he was still able to grasp the right to be the Supreme Ruler of Graycastle. At the same time he took over the throne, he issued an order to recall all of his competitors – the battle for the throne was over, so the King's sons and daughters should return to Graycastle before the end of the winter after receiving the Prince's edict. Based on the ruling of their conferred territories during the last 6 months, the new King would then be officially canonized.

Petrov could clearly detect the urgent mood within the letter.

Through this, Timothy Wimbledon could firmly secure the throne. Everything depended on the reaction of the King's other children. If they behaved and gave up the fight for the throne, and returned to Graycastle, Timothy would naturally become the undisputed Wimbledon IV.

All documents sent to Border Town would be transferred through Longsong Stronghold first. When Duke Ryan saw the recall order, his first reaction was to snort disdainfully. The former King was always fair towards the nobles, and gave them lots of freedom, but as for the 2nd Prince, his ascension to the throne by force would need to be incomparably harsh. This could be seen when Gerald was sentenced to death by the guillotine, so now, no one would go back to Graycastle, fearing to get the same treatment.

However, in the eyes of the six families of the Longsong Stronghold, this was a well-timed command.

Two months ago, Earl Elk set an unauthorized plan into action and made Duke Ryan very unhappy, especially since the plan failed. The Prince's reaction was very intense, sentencing Dmitry Hill to death by hanging. With this, both sides could be regarded as having a public and acrimonious conflict.

Duke Ryan had originally intended to wait until the end of the Months of the Demons so that he would have a free hand to solve the awful problem, but now he had this document. With this, he had a legal option. Roland Wimbledon was called back by the soon-to-be King, so when he left, Border Town would naturally be owned by Duke Ryan again. However, if he didn't go back to Graycastle, Duke Ryan would be able to send him back by force – everything under the name of the new King's banner.

In the end, the Duke didn't care which hands the crown would fall to.

Thinking of his return to Border Town, Ambassador Petrov naturally didn't feel very comfortable. Last time, he had vowed that by his next visit he would bring a new trade agreement, but in the end the result was that they were attacked by the Elk Family. Now he was back, bringing bad news once more – whether it was the death of his father Wimbledon III, the new king, or the recall order, Petrov believed that the 4th Prince didn't want to see any of them.

Since the Kingdom of Graycastle laid in the South of the

continent, the way to Border Town was smooth sailing because even in winter, the river didn't freeze.

From time to time, Petrov went to the window and took a look outside. During the journey he didn't see any person dead, starving, or even fleeing, which indicated that Border Town had yet to fall.

This made him a little surprised. After all, the last time he had visited, he had seen that the wall had yet to be built. Petrov didn't have much confidence in them since they were building a stone wall out of mud.

Then, an even more surprising situation appeared, he saw a boat with the banner of Willow Town hanging on its mast slowly passing them on the right side of the river – this would usually be a familiar scene, but not during the Months of the Demons! Even when Border Town was fighting with the demonic beasts they were still able to do business? Without transferring all of their mining workers towards defending, how could they withstand the brutal attacks of the monsters?!

Three days later, Petrov's vessel arrived at Border Town's pier.

It was still the same dilapidated wooden dock, but now at its end was wooden shed. After the ship docked, two guards emerged from the shed, staring at the boatmen's every move.

Petrov immediately understood what Roland intended with this arrangement.

Obviously, the 4th Prince didn't want anyone to secretly leave the town by the river.

After identification by the guards, someone immediately brought him a horse and then took him to the castle while accompanied by guards.

Just like the previous time, Prince Roland Wimbledon met Petrov in the living room. Moreover, although the time was not the regular meal time, the Prince still commanded the attendants to prepare a rich meal.

Grilled ham, dried fish slices, an unknown salad prepared with wild herbs, as well as butter, bread, and vegetables that could be seen at any dinner party were prepared.

It seemed that the Prince liked to talk business during dinner.

While Petrov had such thoughts, his hands did not stop for a single moment. After all, in the last few days he hadn't had much of a chance for a meal. Even his own Honeysuckle Family, when they had no dinner guests, would basically eat only bread with bacon.

After dinner, the dessert was served. During this time, Petrov respectfully handed over the letter.

Roland took the letter and opened the wax seal with his dining

knife. Out of sight, he rolled out the letter and took a quick glance, then he became stunned.

The king was dead?

Roland had no feelings for this nominal father at all. Since his crossing over, he had been living in Border Town, so he had never seen his father face to face, let alone that in the 4th Prince's memories of his father, his father had only blamed and resented him. Because of this, he felt that he was caught in a very embarrassing situation – should he have a sad look on his face?

Reading the following contents, he could smell a conspiracy. Wimbledon III was murdered by his eldest son? Under the identity of the new King, the 2nd Prince announced the end of the battle for the throne and immediately ordered all of his siblings back to Graycastle?

Roland coughed, and raised his head, just to see Petrov's apologetic eyes.

So, he thought, I'm afraid Duke Ryan will be happy regardless what I do. No matter whether or not I comply to the new King's orders, both are a dilemma of their own.

He didn't bring the trading agreement, but instead brought a letter of bad news. I think at the moment he feels very sorry. Roland secretly smiled, then folded the letter again, "I got it."

“Well, Your Highness, then what are you going to ...”

“Even if I want to go, I will have to wait until the end of the Months of the Demons. Right now in the ice and snow, if I’m gone, then what would the people of Border Town do?”

If it was someone else, Petrov would certainly say something like, “Do not worry, my Longsong Stronghold will help you to handle this situation properly”, or any other diplomatic responses. But in front of the 4th Prince who he had only seen twice, he couldn’t speak carelessly. It was the first time that Petrov loathed his own identity as ambassador. In the end he merely nodded, “I understand; should I pass a reply for you?”

As an answer, Roland called his attendants to bring over a pen and paper. He wrote a quick reply and then sealed it with wax and his own stamp, and handed it over to Petrov. The latter glanced at the envelope. It was clearly written to Prince Timothy Wimbledon of Graycastle on the cover instead of King Wimbledon IV.

Petrov thought, now Roland has made his statement.

Chapter 55 - A Once In Thousand Years Opportunity

Roland opened the door to his office, seeing that Barov was waiting for him.

Roland threw the letter towards his assistant minister, then sat himself on his chair, with his feet on his desk.

If he had not been in the presence of an outsider, he would hum a ditty.

“Your Highness, it’s okay to grieve.” Barov began to frown while quickly reading the letter .”The death of the King is such a tragedy, and he was even murdered by his own son. This is really a tragedy, I don’t know what Your Highness should do next.”

“The trial leading to Gerald’s death was just too strange. I want to wait and see what my elder sister and my younger sister decide to do,” Roland said, “but in any case, there are some things we should do in advance, even if we do it only to be on the safe side.”

Barov looked at the Prince, waiting for him to continue.

“Because of the replacement of the King, the next few months or even years can become turbulent, so the first thing we should do is safeguard our loved ones and family members.” What was more important was the fact that the 2nd Prince could kidnap these people to threaten them, now, if he wanted to maintain Border

Town's administration and financial affairs functionality, his assistant minister was indispensable. Roland sipped his tea and then continued, "You and Carter, as well as your subordinates should all write them a letter, I will have the guards deliver them while they deliver my response to the King, then they will arrange for them to take shelter in other towns."

"Not in Border Town?" Barov wasn't a fool, after twenty years of political experience he immediately understood the prince's meaning.

"No, they won't come directly to Border Town." Roland didn't want the other side to use the families of his subordinates to threaten them, and he also didn't want his subordinates to think that he himself would threaten them with their families, so he chose a compromise. He would first bring them to a more secure town, and after he had a strong foothold in Border Town, they could be migrated.

"I understand, I would like to thank Your Highness for your concern." The Assistant Minister spoke while nodding in agreement, which let Roland feel relieved. It seemed that his subordinates were intelligent people who could think for themselves.

Roland declared, "Another thing we have to talk about is the ore trade. After the last iron ore trade, we will put a stop to the ore trade and sell only rough stones to Willow Town. I need the iron ore saved for our own usage."

"That wouldn't be good. As a result of that, our revenue would

decline, Your Highness.”

“Yes, but it will not drop too much. Recently the miners found a new deposit of gems, so with this we can make up part of the gap.” explained Roland, “And winter isn’t really the time for business, the peddlers hesitate to come trading when they always have to fear an attack of demonic beasts, so we will most likely only have two to three transactions during the next four months. Thus it is obvious to trade rough stones to make up for the less trade, since they are the more cost-effective choice.”

“I see.” Barov accepted the explanation and recorded the orders down.

After his Assistant minister had left, Roland called for Carter and told him, “I need to expand the size of the militia, so you will be responsible for it and will give out recruitment orders. You will need to quickly evaluate their abilities, and if you find strong members they will be appointed as team captains. You will also implement the same training methods like last time.”

“Your Highness, if I train them according to those training methods, I am afraid the new team will need a very long time before they can be deployed to the battlefield.”

“As long as they are stronger than the mob.” Roland dismissed his concerns and told him to do what he said. Despite his input, the training level was far away from that of the army. He was afraid that this level of training was only on the level of a college student military training, but sometimes it was only important to have better combat effectiveness compared to their opponents. In

addition to fighting against the brainless demonic beasts, most of the time they would fight against a noble's private army, mercenary soldiers, or if needed, turned into a mixed arm. So as long as they used cross-era weapons and equipment, even an army on the level of college students would be able to cope with it.

After Carter left, Roland could not stop himself from laughing.

He did not think that such a fortuitous situation would fall into his hands! It was simply like someone sending him charcoral during a snowstorm or handing him a pillow when he was sleepy.

Was this bad news for me? Was this a dilemma? Wrong! He didn't know much about Garcia Wimbleton, but he was sure that she wasn't a woman who would allow men to trample on her. The 1st Prince was sentenced to death in such a short time, even if there was no insider, she probably wouldn't easily return to Graycastle only because the 2nd Prince had ordered her.

It was the same for himself. He would just stay in Border Town, so someone would be bound to come out – most likely it would be Duke Ryan from Longsong Stronghold, since he was such a restless person. Otherwise, he wouldn't send someone in this horrible weather during the Months of the Demons, only to deliver the letter to his hands.

One day Duke Ryan would want to confront him, since until Roland left Border Town, Ryan could not rest or eat in peace.

Choosing to stay in Border Town would be equivalent to defying

the new King's edict. If Roland would only wait until the end of the Months of the Demons, Duke Ryan would in all likelihood, under the name and banner of Timothy Wimbledon, try to teach him a lesson. That was exactly what Roland wanted.

If you asked someone what they needed for faster industrialization, the answer would be undoubtedly, people.

Large-scale production required a large number of staff devoted to it, after all, a lot of people were needed to drive huge machines. In that time, the term "sheep ate people" came into existence. It described, that when tenant farmers in Britain were thrown off their land to starve so that sheep could graze and produce wool for new mills, turning them into free laborers.

The Industrial Age was a cruel time. So long as they unceasingly invested into the education of the laborers they could achieve a generous payment. The more developed the industry, the larger would be the population.

If Roland had a problem, then it would be Border Towns low population.

Border Town had around 2000 inhabitants. Even with the newly invented machines, it was only a small type of workshop. There were not many free laborers, so many projects couldn't be expanded. But from where should he snatch so many people?

Should he buy slaves? Not to mention, he didn't know from where he could buy so many slaves, adult slaves would cost a lot of

money, and they would have little sense of culture. Buying slaves under the age of ten and teach them would take too long, granted that he would allow child labor, so he would have to wait for many years.

Recruit talented people? To this borderland, how many people would be attracted to this town? And for them he would need to spend even more than for slaves.

Encourage his people to increase the birthrate? Forced marriages? Forget it...

He also couldn't hope to get more people from Longsong Stronghold, the kingdom was in a steady state, so if he tried to lay his hands on the surrounding lords, he would become a joke in the future. For the same reason Duke Ryan didn't dare to face Roland openly, he could only take actions in secret.

But now it was different, after Timothy took over the throne, he would be eager to have all his competitors disappear, all this could be seen from the recall order. Duke Ryan apparently was able to see this point, once the old King was gone, and he had the control over the west border, so if he didn't try to enforce his rule it would be strange.

This was a long-awaited opportunity for Roland.

Longsong Stronghold was already for hundreds of years the business center at the west border, with nearly ten thousand residents. But behind the stronghold lay the big cities, without any

strong defense. He would just have to beat Duke Ryan, take over the city, and get a large number of freed men and at the same time he could accumulate a lot of wealth.

What would be easier than the annexation of the population? What way would be faster to get wealth than to plunder it?

This message was just like a beacon to dispel the mist, illuminating the future path of Roland.

He definitely would not miss this golden opportunity.

Chapter 56 - Between The Mountains

Nightingale was slowly moving forward on the mountain path.

The path under her feet was only shoulder width. On either side of her was a huge rock wall, separated by ten feet. But between them was a bottomless ravine and the shoulder wide path she was walking on, so directly next to Nightingale's feet was a steep cliff and a huge wall out of rock. When she looked into the deep ravine she could only see darkness. While traveling on her shoulder wide path, Nightingale was always carefully leaning on the rock wall next to her, trying not to avoid losing her footing and falling into the ravine.

When she looked up, only a thin shimmer could be seen from the sky, like a silver thread hanging in the night sky. However, she knew that it was just a little after noon – even during the day, she still needed to hold a torch. The light coming down the cliff was not sufficient enough to illuminate the road ahead. Walking on this path for a long time even gave birth to the illusion that she was walking in the mountains.

The only advantage here was that not much would fall down the gorge, despite the cold wind whistling through the mountains and lifting up the fallen snow. Occasionally there were a few natural snowflakes that fell on her head from, and landed on the mountain walls or on the trail, turning into water vapor. Down here, the temperature wasn't the same as it was in the outside world, occasionally she could see the hot air rising up from below the cliff.

If it weren't like this, she wouldn't dare to pass the Impassable

Mountains during the Months of the Demons. She could hide herself in her own world of fog, but there, it would be still the same temperature. If she were to brave her way through the snow, she estimated that she would freeze to death after an hour of walking.

Nightingale didn't want to spend an extra minute down here – she could always feel something in the dark, always watching her, making her blood run cold.

If she could, Nightingale would stay in the fog the whole way, but it was a pity that her strength wasn't enough to do that. When she used her ability for a long time, she would quickly become exhausted.

Nightingale raised the torch and let it illuminate the opposite cliff. In the faint firelight, she could occasionally see dark shadows on the walls. Nightingale knew that those were caves, which were so deep that light couldn't reach the end of each cave. They looked like orbs of darkness. But on the other side, nearly at the same position, was also a deep hole. It reminded her of the North Slope Mine's rumors, which said that the mine used to be a monster's underground lair, with many forks in the road that extended in all directions, dug out by monsters. The Northern slope was part of the mountain range, but it was so far and wide with so many caves, who could say that the caves weren't connected to the mine?

The idea made her shiver.

To the West of the Impassable Mountain range was the abandoned barbarian wasteland. It was known that the Impassable

Mountain range extended for several hundreds of miles, with countless undiscovered caves. Nightingale was afraid that this wasteland could give birth to countless monsters.

She did not dare think of going into the caves and only concentrated on moving forward.

Finally, she could see a change in the road further ahead. The shoulder-wide path split into two, one leading slightly upwards and the other one leading downwards, leading deeper into the darkness without end; no one knew where this pit lead to. While standing on the bifurcation point, the feeling of being stared at had become very intense, as if countless eyes were motionlessly looking at every move Nightingale made, making her have a dry mouth and tongue and giving her a creepy feeling.

Nightingale grit her teeth as she opened her world of fog and quickly stepped into it. Soon, the creepy feeling began to disappear.

While following the path leading upwards, the surrounding air temperature soon begun to fall, but above her head the small thread of silver became bigger. A quarter of an hour later, a huge cave opened up directly in front of her, with its entrance slightly higher than the path she was following. When she set foot into the cave she could see a faint fire deep within.

Finally, she had reached the Witch Cooperation Association's hiding place.

When Nightingale left her world of fog, she was immediately detected by the witch in charge of defense, who instantly set up a wall of black smog to block her. However, soon the wall disappeared and a surprised voice could be heard from the darkness, “You’re back!”

Nightingale thought, “Yes I’m finally back,” but when she noticed that the girl had two bands tied around her arm, Nightingale’s good mood turned directly into grief, “Once again two sisters were...”

The other witch’s voice stalled for a moment and then she sorrowfully said, “Uh ... ah, yes. Airy and Abby had their day of adulthood five days ago and didn’t survive it.” She forced herself to smile, “It happens often, doesn’t it? But let us not speak about them, you have to go back to the camp, Wendy is always talking about you.”

Airy and Abby, a pair of twins who left their lives in a wealthy family from the Fallen Dragon Mountain only to die within the Impassable Mountain range. Nightingale sometimes wondered if what they did was alright. If the twins hadn’t left their town with the Witch Cooperation Association, they could have at least enjoyed their lives with their family, rather than following everyone, wandering from one place to another, without any fixed home.

However, when she thought of Wendy, Nightingale’s heart was filled with warmth. If she hadn’t given her a helping hand when she desperately needed it, she was afraid that she herself would still be living a life as a puppet, always fearing to be disposed of just

like every other tool. Yes, she should tell her the news as soon as possible, and she should tell it to all her sisters. They weren't required to hide like little mice any longer. Someone was willing to accept all of them, and there maybe... they could come out unscathed through their annual Day of Awakening!

When she stepped into the camp, Nightingale saw that a familiar figure was squatting near the campfire handling the food. Until now, the other person hadn't seen that she had arrived, so she couldn't help herself and shouted, "Wendy, I'm home!"

The other witch turned away from her meal and looked towards Nightingale, welcoming Nightingale with her usual smile, "Veronica, welcome home."

Wendy was the embodiment of a good woman and also one of the first witches of the Witch Cooperation Association. Now she had turned 30, but still any wrinkles couldn't be seen on her face. She had red-brown hair which fell straight down, almost reaching her waist, with mature and charming facial features, which gave her the appearance of a big sister. She was always concerned about each and every sister of the Witch Cooperation Association. Whether it be about their daily life or psychological counseling, she would always try to help no matter what happened. If it wasn't for Wendy, there was a big chance that the Witch Cooperation Association wouldn't have gathered so many witches.

She was precisely the reason why Nightingale decided to run away from her family when she met her, embarking with her on a journey into the Impassable Mountain range, trying to find the Holy Mountain. She was also one of the few people who knew her

original name.

“How many times have I already told you that I’m no longer that cowardly little girl from the past?” said Nightingale while smiling and shaking her head, “I’m now a powerful witch, Veronica doesn’t exist any longer.”

“You will always be you, breaking away from your former nightmares doesn’t mean to part with important and happy moments of your past.” said Wendy softly, “Of course, I’m glad you like your new name. Nightingale, I’ve been waiting for you to come back, surely you had to suffer throughout the whole journey.”

“Well,” Nightingale stepped forward and hugged her friend, “Thank you.”

After a moment Wendy opened her mouth and asked, “What happened to the girl, you ... were you too late to save her?”

When hearing her speak of this, Nightingale’s spirit immediately began to rise again. She grabbed the Wendy’s arm and said excitedly, “No! She did not need me to save her. On the contrary, maybe she is able to save us all!” Then she began to describe in detail her experience of her time living in Border Town, “Border Town is governed by Lord Roland Wimbledon, 4th Prince of the Kingdom of Graycastle. He is willing to shelter all of us, and he also promised, that one day, that all witches in his territory could live the life of a free person, just like everyone else!”

Chapter 57 - Cara The Snake Witch

However, Wendy wasn't as excited as Nightingale had thought she would be. Instead, she asked in a skeptical tone, "Did he really say that?"

"Yes, even before I arrived in Border Town, he had already rescued two witches, Anna and Nana. From the beginning, the Prince never thought that the power of the witch came from the devil; he said it was our own strength -" Nightingale suddenly stopped, realizing that the other didn't believe anything.

Good stop, she thought, this isn't Wendy's fault. They will probably only believe it when they hear it directly from the Prince, but maybe even then they will doubt it. After all, it would be exactly what every witch's heart was longing for. We witches were oppressed for far too long, even on the way from the east to the border of the Impassable Mountain range, we could see many living examples where witches were betrayed and abandoned, without any person who would reach out to them with a helping hand.

When thinking about all this, her excitement gradually subsided. Perhaps this trip wouldn't go as smoothly as she had thought.

"Wendy, you know what my magic had evolved into on my day of adulthood. In addition to being able to see the magic flow within a person, I'm also able to identify if a person is lying or not," stated Nightingale seriously, "So when I asked him, why he would take such a big risk to save us witches, he replied, "In Border Town we don't care about your background." He just wants all the witches

to be able to live as free people.”

“But while doing this, he will become a thorn in the side of the Church,” Wendy frowned and asked, “Even if the Prince does not understand what it means, you do know it, right?”

Nightingale could not help it but she began to chuckle loudly, “My initial thoughts were almost the same like yours, so I asked him: Do you think you can really achieve this? And guess how he answered me?” She paused, and then repeated verbatim, “If you do not step out, you will never know the answer.”

Wendy was surprised when hearing this and had to ask, “That wasn’t a lie?”

“No lie.” confirmed Nightingale.

“It sounds unbelievable.” Wendy’s voice became slightly relaxed. She and Nightingale were already friends for many years, so she couldn’t think of a reason why she would try to deceive her.

“Yes...,” Nightingale deeply sighed. If she hadn’t personally heard it, since she could verify it with her ability, she probably wouldn’t have believed him so quickly. Now in retrospect, just like when they stood on the city wall and talked about it, Roland really seldom lied. During the two months she stayed at his side, beside the moment they stood on the wall he had sometimes tried to deceive her once, but Nightingale was still very satisfied with his answers.

After all, she didn't care that he was trying to deceive her a little. Instead if you would just tell an unknown witch all of your secrets, that would be too ridiculous.

“Tonight, when we all come together, I want to tell this important news to all of our sisters!” Nightingale looked pleadingly at Wendy and said, “And I want you to help me convince them.”

When the evening came, the witches who were busy outside the camp returned one after another. When they saw that Nightingale had safely returned, the witches became very happy, coming towards her and asking her how she did. Seeing that their arms were wrapped in a white cloth, Nightingale felt heavy within her heart; at the beginning she still casually answered a few questions, but with time she turned more and more silent.

But then she began to tell her long story. She talked about how she had sneaked into Border Town, how she met Roland, Anna and Nana, the construction of the city wall, the construction of the steam engine, how they had resisted the attack of the demonic beasts, and finally about Anna's adulthood. Nightingale even took out the drawing of the construction plans for the steam engine, to prove to everyone that she wasn't lying.

Most of the witches, after they entered the Witch Cooperation Association, would live a cloistered life. For them, it was difficult to imagine the life in the outside world, so they listened attentively. But when Nightingale said that Anna hadn't suffered any pain during her day of adulthood going through it unscathed, the crowd suddenly began to rage. This was a great concern, the

day of adulthood bothered witches for all of their lives, and lead to leaving a sheltered and warm life. They even went into the Impassable Mountain range, losing everything only to look for the legendary Holy Mountain. If what Nightingale said was true, that there was a territory lord who was willing to accept them, who even knew how they no longer had to suffer from the Demons Bite, wouldn't that have been even more perfect than the Holy Mountain?

At this point, a path began to spread through the crowd, and a witch with a head full of green hair and half of her body plastered with snake tattoos walked in front of Nightingale.

When she saw her, Nightingale bowed and greeted her respectfully, "Respected mentor, hello." The witch who came was the founder of the Witch Cooperation Association, Cara the Snake Witch. When speaking with her, all the witches called her their mentor.

"I heard the story you just told," when Cara spoke her voice hoarse and hollow, "Do you want to tell everyone that what we are doing is wrong?"

"No, mentor, those are not stories, I mean – "

"Enough," Nightingale was interrupted by Cara who was waving impatiently, "I do not know what happened to you, but when you went to this Border Town, it made you say such words. A prince, that sympathises with a witch? It's practically as laughable as sympathising with a frog, " She turned around with a cold smile, and raised her arms in the air shouting, "Sisters! Have you all

forgotten how those mortals treated you all!”

Not even letting Nightingale say something, she continued to shout, “Yes, that group of mortals, the group of incompetents who pretend to fight in the name of God, who are always aiming a sharp blade or whip at us. If there wasn’t a God’s Locket of Retribution, how could they step on us witches? Our ability doesn’t come from the devil, instead it is a gift given by God! The one who take charge of God’s authority shouldn’t be them, but we! Us the sisters of the Witch Cooperation Association! The Holy Mountain recorded in ancient books, is the residence of the gods!”

What ... Nightingale couldn’t believe what she had heard, though the leader of the Witch Cooperation Association was always considered as an eccentric. She was strongly attached to the search for the Holy Mountain, with a passion exceeding that of any ordinary person, but she was always very far from madness. Although Cara wasn’t as approachable as Wendy, at least she had always treated the concern of her sisters with sincerity. But Nightingale had never thought that she could be so hostile to ordinary people.

Could it be that over the past few years she had always been suppressing her hatred and anger? The so-called not to get involved into profane affairs, merely in order to save power, only so that we can one day impose a thunder-like retaliation in the future? Nightingale thought to herself, was that the true reason why Cara hid herself?

“We have found a clue to the gate of the Holy Mountain, it is just like it is described in the ancient books! It’s only twenty more days

until the red moon will appear in the night sky just like a drop of blood, raising from the direction of the great Shimen, we will eventually arrive on the other side!” suddenly Cara stopped to speak and turned back to look at Nightingale and exclaimed, “You’ve been fooled by mortals, since we have been born we had lived in a huge scam. The suffering during the day of adulthood is a test by God, only the strong-willed, with indomitable talent and genuine power can pass it. As for the Church, ” she sneered for the second time, “They are a group of mortals who dare to borrow and act in the name of God, sooner or later they will have to go to hell.”

“And you... Child, now it’s time to come back,” Cara paused for a moment and then continued, “If you forget those stories you just told, I can forgive your ignorance and mistakes. As a member of the Witch Cooperation Association, you will get help from us, and together with us, you will go on the search for the Holy Mountain, to obtain eternal freedom.”

Nightingale’s heart had turned completely cold. The pain was only a test? That suffering during the day of awakening, the sisters who weren’t strong enough to hold on, they weren’t worth it, they were only losers? This argument was simply exactly the same as that of the church. While the surrounding witches unexpectedly exposed an expression of resonance, even Wendy didn’t come out to express her disapproval... Nightingale suddenly felt dull, and within the blink of an eye, the founder of the Witch Cooperation Association, every witch’s mentor, had turned into a stranger.

Nightingale shook her head, “So, I’ll be willing to take every sister with me who want to leave, but if you decide to stay... I wish you good luck.”

Just as Nightingale was ready to leave, suddenly a slight tingle could be felt in her lower leg. When she looked down, she could see that a fine, shining blue and black striped snake had bitten her into her calf – this was Cara’s magic of the snake, it was silent and she could use a variety of toxins.

The paralysis quickly spread through her whole body, so when Nightingale tried to open her mouth to say something, she fell into darkness.

Chapter 58 - Escape

Nightingale didn't know how long it lasted, but when she woke up she discovered that her hands were tied to a stake. The same could be said about her waist and feet, they were also tied to the stake. She tried to free herself by struggling, but her body was tied to the pole so strongly, that she was totally immobile.

The next step was to try using her magic ability, but she couldn't feel the familiar feeling when reaching for her power – she seemed to be also cut off from her magic powers, so she was completely tied up. When Nightingale looked down along her body, she saw that a transparent prismatic stone was hanging down from her neck.

“You're finally awake.” Cara walked in front of her and begun to talk to Nightingale, “What do you think about my petrifying venom? Honestly, I had high hopes for you, Nightingale. However, sadly you couldn't live up to my expectations.”

” ... ” Nightingale didn't know how to answer first but then she took a deep breath and spoke reproachfully, “You were actually hiding a God's Locket of Retribution. Cara, do you still know what you are doing?” This stone was originally shackles used by the Church to suppress witches, but now even their own mentor used it to deal with her, just like the Church! Though what made her even more angry was the callous look on the faces of the surrounding crowd, it seemed that there was nothing wrong with what they were seeing. Damn it, cried Nightingale at the bottom of her heart, don't you think that you turned into the kind of person who us witches hate the most?!

“This is only a tool, which will be occasionally used to punish bad girls who won’t listen.” Explained Cara indifferently, “And you, Nightingale, are such a person who need to be punished, or... should I call you Veronica? Born within a noble family, got reduced to a witch, but still thinking about how to climb the social hierarchy.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“You let me down. When Wendy saved you from the clutches of the aristocracy, I thought you would stand firmly on the side of us, the Witch Cooperation Association. But, look at what you’re doing right now, when we will soon discover the Holy Mountain, you want to stop us from achieving our goal!” Cara shook her head and laughed loudly, but then continued, “Trying to take us sisters with you to the Prince? Were you kept captive for too long and now servility has deeply rooted itself into your being, so that you can only live on when you find for yourself a master; or else ... do you just want to sell them to the nobles, in exchange for receiving a good position for yourself!”

“Everything I do is for my sisters.” Nightingale had to swallow down her anger, after all shouting would be meaningless, so she said calmly “I hope that no one will have to die during their day of awakening, hoping that they can live without worrying where they get clothes and food for their daily life. I never intended to stop your plan, but us sisters should have the right to freely choose our own way of life. At the moment Border Town is undergoing tremendous changes, I brought even the construction plan for the steam engine. It can operate on its own, with a nearly infinite force. With this kind of machine, the water within the mines can

be directly pumped out, so that people don't need to do it every day any longer."

Cara sneered once more and asked pejoratively, "Are you talking about this?" She turned around and pulled a roll out of the stack of parchments and rolled it out, so that everyone could see it, "Although I don't understand everything painted on this parchment, but who would believe that a bunch of dead, cold iron can be pieced together so that it can work independently like a living creature? Do you think we are all three years old children!"

She walked to the front of the brazier and threw the roll into the charcoal.

"No!" Cried Nightingale in vain, only able to stare blankly while the blueprint turned into ashes within the brazier.

"My patience has been exhausted, I will only give you one last chance." while she threatened Nightingale, Cara took an iron skewer out of the brazier, whose end had already turned bright red from the heat. "If you plead guilty in front of all your sisters of the Witch Cooperation Association, admitting that you have been bewitched by the aristocracy, I can spare your life, but the whipping is unavoidable! After all this will be your lesson for cooperating with the enemy. But if you will still be stubborn, I will have to use this iron skewer to pierce your heart, nailing your body at the stake, so that everyone can learn from your wrongdoings." After waiting for a second she said, "Do not miss my last offer of mercy, tell me now how have you decided?"

Holding the iron closer to Nightingale, so that she could have a

better look, holding it so close that she could even feel the scorching heat coming from its tip. If she was still her cowardly self from before, she would have bowed and admitted defeat. But she had already bid farewell to her past self, no longer being that timid girl. Now she was Nightingale, a powerful witch, even in front of death she wouldn't yield!

So she only closed her eyes, awaiting the arrival of her last moment. She didn't know why, but an image of Roland appeared in front of her eyes.

"Stop!" Shouted someone suddenly, for a moment Nightingale hesitated, but then she opened her eyes. Nightingale could see that Wendy walked out of the crowd and said to Cara, "Mentor, look at the white cloth wrapped around your arm. We already have experienced so many deaths, do you really want to add another one?"

"What, even you are being deceived by her? Wake up, Wendy! What she said are all lies!"

"I do not know." Wendy shook her head and continued, "I do not intend to go with her to Border Town, but I think that one of the things she said was right. We sisters should have the right to freely choose our own way of life."

She turned around and loudly asked the crowd, "Which of you want to leave with her?"

No one within the crowd answered her, the scene fell into

silence.

“So there is no problem when she is leaving alone.” said Wendy. “She didn’t harm the Witch Cooperation Association, so I really cannot watch you kill her.”

Nightingale had fully understood the meaning of Wendy’s words. She couldn’t help but get a sad feeling within her heart. Even Wendy didn’t completely believe what she had said. So because of this she kept silent when she needed her help when trying to convince everyone. But she was still the good-hearted and caring witch, even if she didn’t agree with her point of view, she would still lend a helping hand.

After Wendy’s remark, some whispering voices could be heard from within the crowd, and then a few people spoke up for her.

“Yes, since she is willing to return to the secular world, just let her go.”

“The Church and the pain have already taken so many sisters away from us. Respected mentor, please think about her punishment once more.”

“Everyone shut up!” Cara raged and shouted, “If I let her leave, what will we do when a second or a third Nightingale appear? Also if she sells the position of our camp to the Church, then we will have nowhere to escape!” the voices didn’t quiet down, so she lifted her arm to hit Nightingale with the iron skewer. But Wendy was a step faster, producing a strong breeze of wind, throwing

Cara onto the ground and stopping her striking attempt.

Then she threw a coin into the air, raised and waved her hand, leading the rapid airflow to wrap around the coin and shooting it in the direction of Nightingale. When the airstream came near Nightingale it instantly disappeared. Yet the coin still maintained its speed, accurately hitting the God's Locket of Retribution around Nightingale's neck.

The transparent and prismatic stone released a hitting sound and instantly broke.

"Traitor!" Cara screamed furiously while standing up from the ground, Wendy and Ann belonged to her inner circle and were her right hands, but now one of them had betrayed her! Out of anger she threw out a shadow snake which flew with its mouth open in the direction of Wendy, biting her ferociously at the back of her hand.

At this moment the ropes fell to the ground, still maintaining their wrap up formation around the stake, only Nightingale wasn't any longer at her place, bonded to the stake.

When thinking about Nightingale's ability, Cara felt cold sweat running down her back. She instantly mobilized all of her magic, creating magical snakes, gleaming with all possible color variations, which then poured out of her chest. Ordering them to form a wall, she herself rushed backwards – but Nightingale was still faster than her.

Only one step ... just after one step, she already appeared behind Cara. Thrusting her hands forward, the iron hammer, which actually should have pierced her own heart, went straight through Cara's body.

Chapter 59 - Explorer

“Respected Mentor!” When they saw that Cara had fallen, all the witches around her began to panic.

“Idiots! Ahem...” Cara tried to cover the wound with her hand; she could no longer feel her lower body, “Quickly, go and kill the traitors for me!”

However, at that time Nightingale, who was carrying Wendy, had already turned into fading mist.

When they arrived back at the fork in the road, Nightingale realized that Wendy had fallen unconscious and her arm had turned black, the venom was spreading within her. Now, no hesitation was allowed and every second counted. She gnashed her teeth, ripped off the sleeve around Wendy’s injured arm and then used it to bind the arm as tightly as she could. Then, she drew a dagger from the sole of her boot, and opened Wendy’s wound.

After less than half a quarter of an hour later, she had cut open Wendy’s arm. As long as the arm wasn’t cut off, Nana would be able to heal her. When she had done everything she could do, Nightingale took out two straps and bound Wendy on her back. As long as Nightingale was able to bring Wendy to Border Town alive, Nana would be able to completely heal her.

But to keep her alive for so long... was it possible?

She alone already took three days on the way here, but now while

carrying a person she would naturally need longer. If she were to go faster and accidentally slide down the trail, she wasn't sure if she could climb up again.

Wendy's arm was still losing blood; she would never last three or four days, but Nightingale had no other choice. She would never be able to leave Wendy – after all, she was only injured because of her.

“Do you need help?” Suddenly, a voice could be heard out of nowhere.

Nightingale was frightened and almost simultaneously opened her own world of fog, and assumed a defensive position.

However, there was no person in front of her.

“You don't need to be nervous, I didn't come to fight.”

When Nightingale looked up, she could actually see a person flying in the air. Then, she asked, confused, “Who are you?”

“My name is Lightning, I just joined the Witch Cooperation Association recently. Since I'm always away, it is normal that you don't know me.” She tried to smile easily, “However, I know you, the famous Nightingale, the Shadow Assassin.”

“Did Cara send you?”

“No, no, don’t misunderstand me,” Lightning slowly came downwards, setting her feet on the earth in the end, “I want to go with you.”

Nightingale couldn’t believe what she heard so she asked, “What?”

“You said, ah, we should have the right to freely choose our own way of life,” Lightning paused for a second and then said, “I choose to go with you, it’s that simple.”

“What is ...?” Nightingale was already completely disappointed by the reaction of her sisters; even Wendy hadn’t fully believed in her, but now this girl in front of her – she was actually still a child, around fourteen or fifteen years old, like Nana. She had fresh and neat short blonde hair, a face full of high spirits, and speech and self-confidence that didn’t match her age. Also, she didn’t wear the usual Witch Cooperation Association uniform. Instead, she wore a set of long trousers tailored to match her personal preferences, with many pockets and patches. This could also be said about her vintage leather jacket. The last part of her attire was a crude-looking belt that was fastened around her waist, only God knew where she had picked it up. At first glance, this just looked like a man’s clothing.

“You said that there’s a machine that huffs and puffs out black and white smoke, and that you can also create stones out of gray powder and even have powder that breaks apart mountains with a thunderous bang. I want to see everything!” Lightning was talking full of enthusiasm, “I’m determined to become an explorer who, of course, only goes to interesting places.”

What kind of a reason was this... Nightingale was startled, and she couldn't make a sound, but even in this kind of conscious she could still tell that Lightning was not lying.

"I do not understand... If you want to be an adventurer, why would you leave the Witch Cooperation Association and join me?"

"Not an adventurer, I want to be an explorer!" Lightning stressed, "I'm not one of those who are only driven by money, who say that they are risk takers, but in fact are only doing the dirty work of others. Explorers only act out of interest! Are you asking why I don't want to be with the Witch Cooperation Association..." explained Lightning confidently, "who are looking for the Holy Mountain, which should be the dream of every explorer? Cara doesn't understand the spirit of adventure, she is completely immersed in the old book, only looking along the road for the characteristics described in the ancient book. She is walking through the Mountain range only searching for two weathered pillars rising out of the ground. If this is the way she does it, she will never find the real holy mountain. My father always stressed the point that an explorer must honestly record everything they see when looking for a fine horse by using only a picture! That's just the way a explorer should handle the matter.

Although Nightingale would have loved to know what kind of father would teach such ideas and raise such an absolutely strange daughter, now wasn't the right moment to chat. After all, Wendy's life was at risk. Since she didn't mean any harm, an additional helper would be appreciated.

In the end Nightingale only asked, “Your ability is flying?”

“Well yeah,” Lightning nodded and said proudly, “I can even carry you both, and flow forever forward, just like the wind.”

“Then I will have to trouble you.” Nightingale made sure that Wendy was strongly bound to her back and then she held on Lightning’s shoulders, and wrapped her hands around Lightning’s chest.

“Uh ... really heavy.” Lightning grit her teeth, and slowly rose upwards, “I think we probably won’t be as fast as the wind.”

Thus, they began their strange form travel. When Lightning was exhausted, she would be carried by Nightingale, who took everyone through her world of fog. When Lightning was physically recovered, Nightingale would then climb onto Lightning’s back, so that she could fly forward again.

When both of them were exhausted and compelled to rest, Nightingale would find the time to ask her some basic questions – for example, who her father was, or the situation with her family.

Lightning said that her father was the world’s greatest explorer and that he even traveled across the ocean. He had an ocean sailing fleet and was affectionately called Thunder by his crew. However, she had lost her mother when she was still very young, so she didn’t have many memories of her. While on a sea voyage, her ship

had run aground and capsized during a storm. Lightning was lucky and was rushed to an island by the ocean currents, but she lost all contact with her father. On the island, Lightning used the knowledge and skills her father taught her to survive, nearly spending two months alone on that island before she awoke during the winter.

With her new ability she flew westwards across the channel to the south of Graycastle. After going through numerous setbacks, she joined the Witch Cooperation Association in the end. She felt that as long as she adhered to exploring, one day she would be able to come across a miracle and see her father again – as long as he was still alive.

Nightingale didn't gain much useful information from this dialogue. Her ability could only be used to distinguish if the other side was lying, but she couldn't determine the authenticity of the spoken content. In other words, as long as the other person said that the sun was square and didn't doubt it, her ability would still show that they were telling the truth.

However, there was actually some information that could be inferred. For example, she must have been born in a wealthy family – families who were struggling with poverty wouldn't have the time to explore. The fact that her father had an ocean-going fleet was also consistent with this judgment. Therefore, Thunder's true identity was perhaps a wealthy ocean-crossing businessman. Lightning had blond hair, unlike the descendants of the Kingdoms of the mainland and more like the sea people from across the fjords.

Wendy had awoken several times. During these times, Nightingale would always try to let her drink as much water as possible, but after drinking, she lost her consciousness again. Nightingale could feel that Wendy's body temperature was falling lower and lower. This made Nightingale feel increasingly anxious.

The two had no other alternative than hurrying, and the normally three-day-long path took them one and a half days to finish. At the entrance, the horses the prince had left for them were still tied to the ground, and the heap of straw in front of them was still only half eaten.

Nightingale climbed on one horse while carrying Wendy and let it run, followed by Lightning as she rushed non-stop towards Border Town.

Chapter 60 - Arrangements

Border Town's second militia recruitment went much smoother than the first one. After all, during the winter, the food was rationed so the members of the militia would be given more and better food. On the weekly visiting day, there would be many soldiers who would secretly transfer bread and meat, which they had saved during the week, to their loved ones. Roland told Carter and Iron Axe to overlook these matters, because when those loved ones happily stayed at home with food, they would surely tell their neighbors where they got it.

This would be a perfect example of word-of-mouth recommendation, executed by his militia. The conversations between neighbors were much more effective than information announced by the city hall. At this point, most of the urban areas of the town already knew about it – His Highness' militia wasn't only well paid, but would also eat three meals every day. In addition, the fight with the demonic beast didn't seem so dangerous as previously thought. So during the second recruitment, there were many more candidates than during the first one, and even residents of the better districts came for registration.

The number of people who matched the requirements were much higher than the Roland had expected, so the second recruitment accepted 200 new members who would be trained by Carter during the weekdays. When the horn sounded, the new recruits would also rush to the wall to stand as auxiliary forces on standby.

The Chief Knight and the Assistant Minister raised some

objections, like that at this point the new batch of militia wasn't qualified to fight against the demonic beasts, or that the newly recruited unit had more than twice the number of soldiers of the first unit, which wasn't necessary. Increases of the general public food rations and salary would lead to the increase of their financial expenditure, but even so, if they gave out more gold royals they would not achieve a significant effect.

However, Roland kept to his decision even though these people were not prepared to deal with the demonic beasts.

Yet he didn't dare to inform his men about the plan he came up with. No one was allowed to know that he intended to attack the Duke's stronghold – if he told them about his idea now, he was afraid that Barov and Carter would find it totally unacceptable.

The difference between the Longsong Stronghold and Border Town was just too big. As the official border stronghold of the Kingdom of Graycastle, its walls were ten feet tall, and was built brick-by-brick by stonemasons. With the Duke's private army and the six noble families' private armies and also the city's own soldiers, they could mobilize more than 1000 soldiers. In theory, it was impossible to win a siege when one could only rely on his own army of 300 – even if they were equipped with cross-era guns.

And because of the God's Stone of Retribution, the witches couldn't be used as an assassination squad; Roland had confirmed this point several times with Nightingale. Duke Ryan and the important people of the six families would purchase these stones, not leaving anything to spare – of course, for the outside world this purchase was called donation. If someone wanted to buy such a

stone, they had to donate several dozens of gold royals. Banning the power of the witches within a certain range was the most powerful weapon against the so-called devil's servants and was the biggest annual income source for the Church.

Roland only had a chance when it was an open field fight.

Thanks to this era, most of the soldiers were drafted before a battle. So if the lord didn't want his drafted army to flee halfway, he was required to travel with his army, which would present a perfect opportunity to implement Roland's annihilation plan. However, he was still unsure about how he could take advantage of this opportunity. After all, his experience of war tactics came only from movies and television works, or historical stories, so he had no experience of his own.

In the end, he thought that since he didn't understand it, he should first do the things he was good at.

Roland wanted to stretch out a little and left his office to take a walk in his backyard.

The steam engine II was assembled and standing quietly in the middle of the field. At first glance, the new steam engine looked much cleaner than the previous one, and the welding marks were no longer as uneven as before. This masterpiece was possible thanks to Anna's new capabilities. Her green fire could drill into the tiniest gaps for welding, allowing for the individual parts to fit better together than in the past.

However, the most important difference between the steam engine II and the older steam engine wasn't the overall look, but the integration of a centrifugal governor. The first set of the automatic control system and feedback system in human history could be considered as a big milestone. Roland's governor's structure was very simple, consisting of two iron balls connected with a string to a main rod. At first glance it was just like the [bamboo dragonflies](#) that children played with during their childhood. If someone quickly rubbed the bamboo pole, the two rotating blades would be forced to automatically rise due to the centrifugal force.

For the governor, the equivalent for the fan was the two iron balls – when the steam engine worked, the main rod would be driven to rotate, and when the output increased too high, the balls would spin faster, gradually increasing their height under the influence of the centrifugal force, closing the valve bit by bit. When the output decreased, the ball's speed would also get slower, lowering their position under the influence of gravity, thereby increasing the valve output again. This always kept the steam engine running at a relatively fixed power level.

With speed control, it was now possible to let the steam engine II take over some of the more sophisticated processing tasks.

The gears produced by the blacksmiths were delivered and neatly placed in a corner of the shed.

Looking at them with the perspective of an industrial production line, none of these gears could be called qualified to work with and all of them would be thrown into the defective box, waiting to be

recycled. But in terms of this age, they were rare works of art – the design of involute gears were created with a sense of harmony. The gears that had been immersed in lard emitted a unique metallic sheen.

In addition to produced gears, carpenters who were responsible for the planning had already built the foundation as well as other parts that were already prepared. He let the door guards call for Anna so that they could begin to assemble the first steam-powered borer together.

They began Roland's plan, which he thought was the most effective plan to mass-produce rifles.

Relying only on blacksmiths who had to manually knock out a barrel was extremely time-consuming, but also very boring for the blacksmiths themselves. Now, he only had to take out an iron bar and he could directly drill the barrel out with the borer. So in one day, he would be able to produce more than ten barrels.

At the same time, by replacing the head, the boring machine couldn't only be used to cut but also to engrave the rifling. With rifled flintlocks, the firing accuracy would be further improved.

Thus, he was confident that before the end of winter, the two groups of militia, nearly 300 people, could all be armed with rifles.

However, Roland couldn't guarantee that his army would be able to calmly load, aim, and shoot at their targets in the face of charging knights. It was more realistic to think that they would

rather drop their weapons, turn tail, and run away. After all, the training time of the two troops were too short, they had no combat experience against other humans.

So, he had to bring out a more powerful weapon onto the battlefield, a weapon which could defeat the enemy even before they could start their own assault.

That was artillery.

As the God of War in the history of human warfare, the destruction and deterrence brought by artillery wasn't reproducible by guns. A six-pound field artillery had the range to attack the other side before they were even able to gather. The mixed-up armies of this era would surely be unable to maintain discipline in combat while being under constant fire. As long as he could get three or four field guns, his enemy would never have the chance to charge.

Roland was following a step-by-step plan – with his manual milling machines, which could be used to process usable steering gear, he would be able to produce the speed-controllable steam engine II, and with this machine he could create his own borer. With steam boring, he would be able to process a variety of gun barrels and cannon barrels.

There was still at least two months until the end of the Months of the Demons, so as long as his plans played out smoothly, Border Town's militia would have the power to compete with the Duke in a full out battle.

Chapter 61 - Return

Just when Roland squatted down to install the base for the new steam engine, three figures suddenly emerged out of thin air. They landed, staggering, in front of his feet and took him with them when they fell to the ground.

Anna was so scared that she immediately jumped back and set up a wall of green flames to try to block the strangers.

When Roland looked up, he found that one of the women was the long-awaited Nightingale. From her face, she seemed very exhausted. Her cheeks were abnormally red, so obviously she had been running in the cold and windy weather for a long time, but despite the wind, her forehead was covered with dense sweat.

Nightingale lifted her head and cried with palpable anxiety. “Your Highness, please call Nana and have her come over! We need her immediately!”

Now, Roland noted that the woman tied to her back was very pale and had her eyes closed. She was wrapped in clothes which were dark red from the oozing blood and had a nearly cut off arm.

He immediately reacted and shouted toward his guard. “Cardin, run to the medical center and fetch Nana!”

“Yes, Your Highness!” answered the guard as he dashed away immediately.

Aside from these two, there was also a young girl caught in Nightingale's armpit. She looked like she wasn't in a serious situation, and was looking around with eyes full of curiosity.

"You aren't hurt, right?" Roland stepped forward to untie the woman with the injured arm from Nightingale's back.

"I'm fine, Your Highness, Keke ... I'm very sorry, I couldn't bring back my sisters from the Witch Cooperation Association." Nightingale gasped for air, her voice was very weak. Apparently she had had a very long journey and had almost physically overextended herself.

"Say nothing more, you need to rest first." Roland picked up the unconscious and injured woman and let Anna lead Nightingale. Like this, the five people returned to the castle. Nightingale had the room next to Anna's, so when they came to the castle, he immediately ordered the maids to build a fire in her room and to also deliver a vat of hot water. After Nana arrived, he first explained to her what had happened before she began to clean the wound and treat the injury while Roland stepped out of the room.

As long as she wasn't dead, Nana would be able to heal every injury like they had never happened, so the problem wasn't if she could save her life. Although Nightingale had carefully tied up the arm, the blood circulation had been cut off for far too long, so he did not know if it could be saved. The following cleaning and treatment required the patient to undress, so as a gentleman, Roland consciously chose to step out.

But how could it have developed into this? Asked Roland himself. Could it be that the Witch Camp was attacked by demonic beasts and there was no one else she was able to save? If that was true, then that would really be a great loss.

Roland was nervously hovering at the door. About half an hour later, the door was pushed open and the first person who came out was the unknown girl who looked unharmed and who had come together with Nightingale .

When she saw him waiting in front of the door, she nodded and said, “You’re exactly the same as Nightingale had described you.”

” ... ” Roland didn’t know what to make out of this sentence, “What did she say about me?”

“A prince who would care about us witches.” while answering his question, the girl lightly shut the door, “Unfortunately, the news was so unbelievable that most of the witches didn’t believe what she said. In fact, I also couldn’t believe her, but it is exactly like my dad had always said, ‘the world is so big, and it has all kinds of people’. My name is Lightning, Your Highness, glad to meet you. “When she finished speaking, she bowed her head and laid her right hand on her left shoulder – it probably was her way to salute.

However, Roland didn’t think any longer about the salute, the part “most people did not believe her,” was the important information. “The Witch Cooperation Association wasn’t attacked by demonic beasts?”

“Attack? No, ah ... Why would you think this?” She nodded her head while thinking but then she suddenly put her index finger on her forehead and revealed an enlightened expression, “Yes, I see. That big sister with the broken arm is Wendy, she was injured by our respected mentor Cara.” Then, Lightning began to tell the story.

After hearing what had happened, Roland fell silent and thought, so it was actually like this ... I really have underestimated the cruel oppression the witches have to face. Now, after being accumulated over many years, the hatred between the witches and the upper nobility of the Church has reached its peak. This Cara, is one of the extremists. Then, Roland got the impression that the first thing the leader of the Witch Cooperation Association would do when she had the power to do it was to eradicate people with the same attitude like herself.

But fortunately, Nightingale was still able to return safely.

And not only that, but she even brought back two new witches with her to Border Town. As for the witch house, Roland thought, he would still let Karl build it. Even if they didn't need it at the moment, there was still the possibility that the number of witches would increase.

“So you were also a sister of the Witch Cooperation Association?”

“Not anymore.” Lightning sighed and then continued, “It's the same for Wendy and Nightingale. Since we left, it is now impossible to ever go back. I'm afraid Cara won't be able to swallow her pride.”

“Will she survive even though Nightingale pierced through her body?” Roland asked disbelievingly,

“Probably. In the camp we have a witch called the Herb Witch, who can increase the effectiveness of herbs several times,” explained Lightning, “by multiplying the effect of some hemostatic grasses and turning them into a blood replenishing medicine, rescuing Cara’s life should not be a problem, but compared to your witch who has the ability to heal, the effect is inferior.”

Hearing this, Roland thought, this will really be a nuisance, it seems like it wasn’t enough to just worry about to the Church, now I also have to look out for the witches. Fortunately, their purpose is to look for the Holy Mountain, so I hope the trouble of looking for Nightingale is too much for them.

“Previously you had said that you didn’t believe in what Nightingale had said, so why did you go with her and leave the Witch Cooperation Association?”

“Because you have a machine that huffs and puffs black and white smoke, and you can also create stones out of gray powder and even have powder that breaks apart mountains with a thunderous bang.” Lightning repeated the exact same words she had said to Nightingale, “Maybe there wasn’t be a Prince who was good to the witches, but she wouldn’t have lied to me, it is impossible to make up such lifelike ideas – at least this was what my intuition of an explorer had told me, and just seeing the monstrosity in the yard which is capable of ejecting white gas shows me that I was right. This monstrosity? Nightingale seems to

call it...a steam engine, right?"

"Explorer?" Roland automatically ignored the last question.

"Yes, explorer!" Lightning emphasized the word, "This is the reason why I choose to follow Nightingale. All explorers are curious about the unknown."

"..." Roland secretly sighed. What should I do with this witch? Someone like her could only survive in this age if they were born in a rich family. Anyone only had to look at her once to see that she was a tomboy, not only because of her clothes, but also her short golden hair, "Are you sure your name isn't [Izawa Riel](#)?"

Izawa Riel is the chinese name for Ezreal from League of Legends

"Who would that be? My name is Lightning." the little girl proudly explained.

At this point, the door opened once more and Anna and Nana came out.

"How was it?" asked Roland, "Did the healing go well?"

Seeing Nana nod, Roland could finally feel relieved. Generally, a limb needed to be reconnected within six to eight hours. When this time limit was exceeded, the success rate would be greatly reduced. Since Lightning said that they had taken more than one day to travel from the camp to Border Town, the chance to save the limb was actually already very small. It would almost be impossible to

reconnect the nerves by conventional surgery. This once more showed how unbelievable Nana's healing ability was.

Now the young witch was also tired; it seemed that the treatment also cost her great effort. So Roland encouragingly said to them, "You all have worked hard today, so after eating dinner, you both should sleep here with Anna."

Of course, he thought that would also mean that Sir Pine would also sleep here.

Chapter 62 - Oath

Today was such an exciting day with so many surprising matters that Roland didn't want to continue the boring work with the steam engine. Instead, he had his chef prepare an exceptionally great dinner of black pepper steak and fried eggs without any limit to the amount everyone could eat. After eating, Lightning and Anna had to pat their bloated bellies while Nana, chewing on the last piece of meat, was still full of vitality. In addition to the dinner, he had asked the maid to prepare and deliver a stew out of soft meat and waxy porridge in a heat-preserving porcelain dish to Nightingale. Once Nightingale and Wendy woke up, they could immediately eat hot food.

After dinner, the next step was to arrange rooms for everyone. Fortunately, the lords of Border Town loved exquisiteness and grandeur. Even though this small town was only built for mining, as an early security point, the castle was still built to the standards of a medium sized town. Thanks to this, Roland now had a nine hundred square meter living area spread over three floors, along with watchtowers and arrow towers in the form of pagodas in the four corners of the castle. He also possessed his own vestibule and back garden.

Roland arranged the room opposite of Anna's room for Lightning while the room next door went to Wendy after her rehabilitation. When Roland saw Nana walk into Anna's room with a sugar stick in her hand, he could not help but shake his head in amusement.

Back at his office, Roland poured himself a cup of ale. A plan was only good until the first deviation. He had thought that with the help of Nightingale, he would have gotten a batch of new witches,

getting a boost in science and technology and upgrading agriculture etc., but he had never expected that the leader of the Witch Cooperation Association would have such hostility towards non-witches. Witches like Nightingale seemed to be a minority. Wendy... after the talk with Lightning he knew that Wendy actually didn't want to leave the Witch Cooperation Association. She only intended to save Nightingale, but after her intervention, she was treated as a traitor by Cara and the other witches.

After his first drink, Roland poured himself a second one. Even if the ale wasn't the best, it was still better than nothing.

During the meal, Roland had asked Lightning about her and Wendy's abilities. Lightning said she could fly like a bird and fly freely through the air while Wendy was able to control the wind. Hearing this, Roland couldn't think of a good use for a technological upgrade, but for the upcoming war they held great potential.

He also asked her about the abilities of the other witches at the camp and found out that their abilities varied strongly and seemed not to follow any rules. Some effects could hardly be described with science while some were completely bizarre.

For example, Cara the Snake Witch, the founder of the Witch Cooperation Association. She could condense her magic into snakes – these snakes were not illusions, they could be touched and also attack an enemy. The different colors of the snakes represented the different venoms. Lightning herself had only seen two types of snakes, paralysis and toxic.

Roland found that it wasn't only Anna, but Cara and the other witches could also only use their magic within a small range. For example, when Anna's Green Fire left a range of five meters, it would suddenly disappear. Cara's snakes also couldn't stray too far. For Nightingale, it was an even shorter distance. When she wanted to influence a foreign object, she would have to leave her fog and become visible.

For this reason, they were always equipped with crossbows in case they had to face the Church or any other army who possessed God's Stone of Retribution. Otherwise, they could only flee in all directions.

Roland worked until midnight, and the fire in the fireplace had already dimmed. When he began to sneeze he thought it was time to sleep.

When he opened the door to his bedroom, he thought that he had gone into the wrong room – it was the already familiar scene again, where a woman was already in the room, sitting on his bed. Her figure was half shrouded in darkness, her shadow reflected by the fire was only displayed in mosaic, like a mural. However, this time there was a big difference to the previous instances, namely that the woman was no longer wearing her body-hiding robes. Instead, she had replaced them with ordinary civilian clothes. Her appearance was no longer hidden from the outside world, and now everyone could directly see her appearance.

Nightingale.

Roland became a little nervous, this kind of battle, would ... it be

a lucky one?

When Nightingale noticed that the Prince had come in, she got up and slowly walked over. Even only after half a day of rest, her face looked better than how most people would ever look. Her pale cheeks were replaced with rosy ones, and her hair didn't give her a dull appearance. He thought, I have to say, the resilience of a witch is really amazing.

“You worked hard in the past few days.” Roland coughed, breaking the silence and then continued, “Why don't you rest longer? Lightning has already told me everything.”

Hearing this, Nightingale shook her head, giving a solemn impression. This gave Roland the feeling that something was wrong, and in her eyes he could see an indescribable dedication. Roland realized that she had made her decision and was converging her emotions towards him. This look of determination was difficult to see in many other people, so Roland waited until the other had found the right words.

However, Nightingale didn't begin to speak immediately. Instead, she took a deep breath, got down on one knee while holding a dagger in her hand, and slightly bowed her head – this was the etiquette for the standard knight ceremony, when someone part of the aristocracy swore allegiance to a superior, they would often do it this way.

“Your Highness Roland Wimbledon, I, Veronica, also known as Nightingale, swear,” she said in a formal tone, “As long as you will be kind to the witches, I will be at your service, whether as a strong

shield against the demons, or as your personal sword during the night, without any fear of regret, until the last moment of my life.”

Roland thought, so this is her decision after the Witch Cooperation Association became such a disappointment to her and destroyed her hope of leading the witches into a better future herself. If it went like he wanted, he would refuse her offer, since he was more accustomed to hiring or working together. If there were further ambitions and a common ideal, they could become comrades.

However, he knew that sometimes it was meaningless to emphasize equality and freedom. As long as there was no suitable soil, even the best seeds would decay. As a prince, he wouldn't be able to depart from his role as a prince until he unified the kingdom..

After a moment of silence, Roland acted accordingly to the court etiquette in the memories of the former prince. He took her dagger and then touched her shoulders three times with his own sword, “I accept your allegiance.”

Nightingale's shoulders trembled slightly. It seemed she could finally relax.

Then he stretched out his right hand, holding it in front of her.

Nightingale took his fingers and delicately kissed him on the back of his hand. With this the ritual came to an end.

Although the allegiance ceremony exercised by the witches was extremely nondescript, following through the whole set of actions couldn't be archived with an ordinary background ,. And she also called herself Veronica... "Is Veronica your real name? Don't you have a last name?" Roland pulled her up and asked.

"Yes, Your Highness. I have no intention to hide anything from you. Five years ago, I had left the house of Gilen. Now the house and I have nothing to do with each other." Nightingale told him everything, and put down even the last barrier to her heart by telling him of her own past.

She was born in Silver City, the city whose name came naturally from their rewarding silver mines. Her father was a viscount, but her mother was born as a commoner. Such marriages were not common, but the two had hit it off well. In addition, Nightingale also had a brother named Hyde. She had spent her whole childhood in Silver City, and that was the happiest period of her life.

Chapter 63 - Old Story

Nightingale had spent her whole childhood in Silver City, and that was the happiest period of her life.

However, this wonderful time only lasted until the winter she turned fourteen. In that winter, refugees started a riot in Silver City. Her parents went out to distribute food but they never came back. Nightingale and her brother were sent, to the home of her father's brother, another branch of the Gilen family.

This was also the winter that Nightingale had awoken to her witch powers.

She carefully hid her abilities, but in the end she was still discovered by Mr. Gilen, who immediately separated Nightingale from her brother and used her brother's life to threaten her into doing his biddings, so Nightingale had no choice. Mr. Gilen sent her to the thieves' guild and made her undergo their training. Later, he had her do some shady things, like breaking into the homes of his enemies to steal trade contracts or other important things, and eavesdropping on the town hall meetings. She even had to go to some potential competitors' homes and put poison in their water tanks.

The Gilen's family business grew bigger and bigger, but Mr. Gilen's attitude toward Nightingale gradually turned worser and worser. If even the slightest thing went wrong, she would be kicked. Every time when she wasn't doing something for him, he would shut Nightingale in a room in their house which had its door replaced with iron bars. The part which made Nightingale the

saddest and most puzzled was that she wasn't able to see her brother Hyde. She began to suspect that Mr. Gilen had already killed her brother.

Having had enough of her repeated requests, he finally brought over her younger brother. However, when Hyde saw Nightingale, he had a look full of disgust and said that he never wanted to see her again because as a witch and the devil's companion, she should go to hell.

Hearing this, Nightingale's world collapsed, but the nightmare wasn't over. Mr. Gilen gave her the final blow – the fact that she became a witch was a secret, but he still told Hyde, and even told him that the farther he got away from a witch the better it would be.

After Hyde bid Nightingale farewell, Mr. Glenn grimly warned her that Hyde would inherit their father's title, but if she wouldn't continue to obey his orders, he would make her brother die quietly.

In this way, Nightingale fell deeper and deeper into sorrow and despair and turned into a puppet manipulated by the Gilen family. On her coming of age day, she had to complete a task for the family and was on the way home when she met Wendy. Or, more precisely, Wendy found her.

Wendy told Nightingale everything about the Witch Cooperation Association, and told her that there were many people who had gone through similar experiences like Nightingale's, but these sisters had not given up. Hearing this, Nightingale's shattered

heart suddenly ignited with a new spark of life.

She didn't need much time to change from confusion to determination. One week after her coming of age day, she had already overcome the torture, forcing her magic to undergo great changes. Her fog no longer hid only her figure, but also kept the iron bars from holding her back.

On the day that she had finally recovered from the afflictions of her coming of age day, she entered her world of fog to step into Mr. Gilen's bedroom to take a knife and slit his throat. . Mr. Gilen let out some high pitched breaths, and then only the sound of popping blood bubbles could be heard. During the whole situation, Nightingale found out that she was much calmer than expected.

Then, Wendy and Nightingale left the Gilen household. As for her brother Hyde, she ignored him and did not want to see him again.

After this, she and Wendy started their journey towards the Witch Cooperation Association.

When Nightingale came to the end of her story, she waited for a moment, but when she felt that Roland was still immersed in her past, she left the room to retire for the night.

As for Roland, after a long time, he had finally collected himself and remembered that Nightingale once said that every witch had a long history of bitterness. If they could reach their day of adulthood, they could even be considered lucky.

While Roland crossed over, it was fortunate that he had become a prince.

The next morning, Roland went to visit Wendy in Nightingale's room.

After a night of rest, Wendy's color looked a lot better, and the previously injured arm looked totally healed. Despite her still being weak, she sat up and bowed to pay tribute to the Prince.

"I already know about you, thank you for saving the life of Nightingale." Roland took a parchment out of his pocket and went straight to the point, "There is no doubt that with Cara as their leader, it will be impossible for you to return to the Witch Cooperation Association. So, it would be better for you to stay in Border Town and work for me. If you agree, you only need to put down your signature on this contract. You will get the same salary like Anna, and every month you will get a gold royal."

"Your Highness ..." Nightingale blinked hesitantly.

Roland knew what she wanted to say. After all, this would change her life. In addition, after Wendy had saved her life in the mountains, Nightingale didn't want Roland to force her to make a decision immediately. In Nightingale's view, as long as Wendy stayed in Border Town for some time, she would certainly come to their side.

"I would like it too if I wasn't forced to talk about this in such a

hurry, but some things become a little more dangerous with every day of delay.” Roland paused for a moment, but Wendy didn’t interrupt him and quietly waited for him to continue, “I think I may know a method to how a witch can survive her day of awakening without any pain.”

This remark brought a loud outburst from the two witches who asked with one voice, “What?”

“It’s just my speculation and there is no tangible evidence.” appeared Roland, “But I think I know the reason why witches in the camp suffered less pain compared to their life in hiding. The only difference between both situations was, while they were hiding their identity as a witch, they didn’t use their magic power, but during their life within the camp, they had to use their ability to maintain daily operations. “

Wendy nodded her head, “You’re... that’s right.”

“And in Anna’s case, she trained her ability daily before her day of adulthood, and she even fell into a coma because of overdrawing her magic power. When she finally regained consciousness, she had overcome the most difficult hurdle as a witch, and even without any injury.”

“So, I think this is probably the key to conquer the Demons Bite that attacks your body. I believe that a witch is a kind of magic container, and during adolescence, the witch is always accumulating magic. When this magic exceeds the body’s tolerance level, it causes harm to the witch’s own body, and the Demons Bite itself is dated with the witch’s day of awakening, the witch’s most

powerful moment.”

“So if a witch can continually release her magic, constantly keeping her magic on a safe level, maybe the torture the witch would have to go through during the day of awakening would be greatly reduced, or even completely disappear.” Roland paused for a moment to let them think, and then he said, “As the lord of Border Town, I can offer your witches a safe place to use their magic. No one will arrest, send you to a trial, or even put you to death for using it. If my guess is correct, then there is no doubt, that Border Town will be the end of your long pursuit of the Holy Mountain.”

A witch was taught from the beginning that her dangerous capability was given by the devil. After endless suffering, the witch would feel that it wasn't her own strength but instead that her power was a curse, starting a vicious circle. The more the witch didn't want to use her magic, the stronger the bite would be. Directly after the crossing, Roland's attitude towards this force was the completely opposite. After going through the memories of the old 4th Prince and ruling out the existence of a God, he had simply seen the magic as a kind of energy, an energy which was controlled by their own willpower.

Wendy was silent for a long time, but then she asked, “When I sign the contract and agree to work for you, then I want to know first... what will I need to do for you?”

During the past few centuries, because of their unique abilities, some witches were bought by a few ambitious people and were secretly imprisoned, used as consumable tools. Although the

Church would look for and punish such behavior, it was still difficult to ban. In addition, they used to be ruthless towards the witches. Once they had lost their value, their fates could be described as a spectacle too horrible to endure.

Of course, Roland had also heard of these cases, but he took a fancy to the long-term interests and believed that this was a win-win situation for everyone. So, he smiled and replied, “The first thing you need to do is practice your ability repeatedly until you fully grasp it – just like Anna.”

Chapter 64 - Curiosity

Three days later, in the castle back garden.

“Sister Anna ...” Nana pulled at Anna’s gown and called her name to get her attention.

“Yes?” The latter turned around and asked.

“What do you think about Sister Nightingale ... don’t you think she has been behaving a little weirdly?”

“Weirdly?” Anna was confused, “Do you mean how she has been dressing herself lately?”

Nightingale stood at Roland’s side, just like the many times before, but this time she was not wearing her usual gown with the strange pattern. Instead, she was now dressed like Anna and wore the strange clothing His Highness had invented. Although Anna did not want to admit it, the new attire accentuated Nightingale’s tall figure– her shapely legs, slim waist, as well as her long curly hair most vividly. Together with her cloak and pointed hat, anyone would let their gaze roam all over her body.

“I wasn’t talking about her clothes.” Nana muttered, “Don’t you think that her tone of voice when speaking with His Highness and the expression in her eyes when she looks at him have become different compared to before?”

“Have they?”

“...” Nana didn’t know what to say, but then she gave up, “Well, sister Anna, later when it’s too late, don’t come to me and say that I didn’t warn you.”

Unable to make heads or tails of it, Anna shook her head and ignored Nana, focusing on the two new witches’ bodies instead.

The first one she looked at was named Lightning. Her general size was the same as Nana’s, but she wore particularly unusual clothes. When Anna roughly counted, she discovered that Lightning had at least twelve seamed pockets on her piece of rag-like coat.

As for the other witch Wendy, she didn’t wear the same body-concealing clothes Nightingale wore before, but on her ordinary and casual womens clothes she had the exact same pattern that Nightingale’s previous clothes had printed on them. However, she had something that didn’t sit right with Anna. The other one’s chest was ... too grand.

“Since you both have agreed to sign the contract, we can now start with your training for the first time.” Roland was finally at ease and started the training of his two new witches, issuing instructions. “Lightning, you go first.”

“Yeah!” Lightning was so happy to start first that she threw her hands in the air as she stepped out of the shed.

At the moment, only a few snowflakes floated in the air and no wind was blowing, so the little girl gently floated in the air and waited for Roland's next command.

"Show me your fastest speed!" Roland looked upwards and shouted to her.

"All right, look at me." she gave him a thumbs up, went into a starting position, and then quickly flew around the castle.

Roland visually calculated her flying speed and came to the result that her flying speed should have been between 60 and 80 kilometers per hour. These numbers were based on his own experiences of driving back in his old world. For a single flight, this speed couldn't be counted as fast, since it was similar to an ordinary dove. However, Roland had heard that she could carry Nightingale and Wendy during their journey back to Border Town. That feat was a lot more impressive compared to her speed.

What would that mean if she could lift up a weight of more than 100 kilograms? In Roland's eyes, he could already see Lightning carrying a 100 kilogram bomb...

However, the next trial broke his wishful thinking.

When the weight was more than 50 kilograms, Lightning's flying height decreased sharply. From the previous hundred meter altitude, she suddenly fell down to only ten meters. While carrying nearly 100 kilograms of weight, she could only reach a height of 2 meters.

That is to say, if he turned Lightning into an incarnate bomber, even when only carrying a few kilograms of explosives, she would enter the range of crossbows and become an easy target to shoot down.

So Roland came up with new ideas for this young witch – whether it was as a scout or as an investigator for the right place for a bombardment, she would be an excellent candidate. Previously, Roland seemed to have hit a wall with his plans, but now he could see a glimmer of hope again.

While the Prince tested Lightning's flying abilities, Wendy stood by quietly at his side, closely analyzing Roland's every expression.

In the fifteen years of wandering after her departure from the monastery, she had seen many different kinds of people. Commoners, farmers, artisans, soldiers and nobles, it didn't matter who it was, but they would all have the same reaction. As long as they didn't know that she was a witch, they showed her desire and love, but when they became aware of the fact that she was a witch their desire and love would instantly convert into fear and hatred. Every time she saw this despicable behavior, Wendy wanted to vomit.

She thought she would only be partnered with witches for the rest of her life and never be accepted by a man. This was also the reason why she refused Nightingale's offer ... not out of mistrust, but because she was afraid of getting her heart broken once more.

However, Roland Wimbledon had already changed her opinion.

He looked at them with the same expression as he looked at common people – like he had already seen witches thousands of times. When she met Roland for the first time in Nightingale's room, she had thought that he hid his aversions towards witches extremely well. She also believed that another reason he didn't show any contempt was because Nightingale stood directly beside her. However, during the next few days she discovered that the expression on his face was still the same.

Could it be that the ability of a member of the Royal Family to hide their true intention is much better than us commoners?

Another changing point was the contract. Previously, Wendy had thought that it would only be a formality. But when she began to read it, she found it filled with dense clauses. It didn't only list their responsibilities, but it also stated their own rights.

This is simply inconceivable! It still put the witch in his army, but it didn't deprive them of their liberty. Instead, it was quite generous to them. Could this still be called a contract?

For example, Article 2.1 (It was the first time that Wendy saw such a structure), the witch could have paid leave, which meant that she would still get money even on the days she didn't work.

Next, the witch should complete experimental projects according to the employer's orders, but when part of the project was too

difficult to complete, wasn't timely possible, produced discomfort, or caused the witch to feel that it was too dangerous, the witch could ask for changes or reject the experimental project.

Then, the next clause said that the employer should provide for and guarantee the safety of the witch. The employer was responsible for the witch's accommodation, food, and salary. When one part of the condition was not met, the witch was allowed to unilaterally suspend the contract.

Wendy thought these articles were a bit prolix, but they expressed their meaning very clearly. After signing the contract, the witch wouldn't be turned into the Prince's possession. Sure, she had to do his biddings, but she also had equal rights and was always able to say no. Due a contract like this, she finally felt the sincerity of the other side – if it was only for appearance, it wasn't necessary to write such a detailed list of treaties.

Coming to this conclusion, Wendy couldn't help herself from looking at Nightingale. Wendy was very clear of everything Nightingale had to go through, and she also knew how deep the other one's disgust of nobles sat. But now, when Nightingale spoke with Roland, her tone and demeanor showed so many different kinds of emotions – I'm afraid even she isn't aware of these changes.

Two months ago, she left the camp of the Witch Cooperation Association in the direction of Border Town. Only in two short months, Nightingale has already begun to completely trust this man.

She would rather cut off all her relations with the Witch Cooperation Association than to never see Border Town again. In her heart it was very likely that she already saw the place beside Roland Wimbledon more as her real home than the Witch Cooperation Association.

It's very sad about what happened to Mentor Cara. She, as the founder of the Witch Cooperation Association, had forgotten how important every surviving sister was.

Wendy knew that there was no way she could ever go back. Since fate had brought her to this place, why shouldn't she believe in the choice Nightingale had made? Just the same, like she always believed in the choices I made –

“Wendy?”

“Ah ...” With this shout, Wendy was brought back out of her daydreams, only to discover that Lightning had already finished her tests and that now everyone was waiting for her.

Giving everyone an apologetic smile, she walked out of the shed.

You have already made your decision, so now you have to go through with it. Plus, you cannot lose to the younger generation, right?

But at this moment, the horn call could be heard from the west again. The sound echoed in the mountains, breaking the

tranquility of the town.

Chapter 65 - Ominous Sign

There had already been several instances before when the horn was blown. Each time, several dozens of demonic beasts had attacked, mostly one after another, but every time the skilled militia had been able to push them back.

So when Roland heard the sound of the horn once more, he did not panic. He calmly suspended the training and sent Wendy and Lightning back to the castle to rest. He also ordered Anna to protect Nana who would go to the medical center to wait for the arrival of wounded soldiers. Roland himself rushed to the walls with Nightingale.

Unexpectedly, when Lightning heard Roland's orders, she began to protest, "Though I'm already such an experienced explorer of the western border of the continent, I have yet to witness a large-scale attack by demonic beasts! If I don't grasp this chance, I'm not worthy to call myself an explorer any longer. So, I plead you, Your Highness, let me travel together with you!"

Roland did not hesitate for the slightest moment to reject the young witch's plea and told Wendy to make sure that Lightning would behave. After all, they weren't allowed to lose any time when a horde of demonic beasts attacked.

Then, he looked at Nightingale and asked her if she was ready to go. She nodded, took hold of Roland's hand, and took him into the fog with herself, moving straight in the direction of the wall – once he knew that Nightingale could bring any other object she was in contact with along with her into the fog, Roland immediately

became hooked to this kind of travel. In the fog, they could travel straight through obstacles and ignore terrain. They were able to cross several meters with one step, so this kind of traveling was very enjoyable.

When they arrived at the foot of the wall, Roland found a corner where no one could see him and stepped out of the fog to walk to the outlook alone. Looking into the distant wilderness, he could only see a world of white instead of the expected grand demonic beast invasion. Was this a false alarm? He could also feel the confusion coming from the direction of the militia, who had already taken their defense positions.

When the Prince finally found Iron Axe, Roland saw that he had a serious expression while staring into the distance with his hands tightly grasping the horn.

When Roland arrived next to him, Roland immediately asked: "Did you sound the alarm?"

"Yes, Your Highness, you see ..." Iron Axe voice was much drier than usual, "That guy came."

That guy? Roland looked carefully in the direction Iron Axe pointed at. There in the far distance, he could make out a faint black spot that was nearly invisible even in front of a pure white background, very difficult to be spotted. The rule was that only if it was determined that the patrol couldn't resolve the problem, they were allowed to sound the horn. Knowing this, Iron Axe as a seasoned hunter must have had his reasons.

“That is a hybrid species,” Iron Axe had to swallow and calm himself before continuing, “The last time I encountered this bird was six years ago.”

Is it really a hybrid species? Roland frowned. Theoretically, evil beasts would attack Longsong Stronghold until the point that all of them had died – possessing no intelligence, the beasts had no concept of retreat in their minds. The defense of the Longsong Stronghold had never been broken, but this hybrid beast not only survived, but was even able to live after six years? Thinking about what this could mean, Roland could detect a faint feeling of foreboding within his heart.

However, the demonic beast was so far away that Roland could only vaguely see a black spot while Iron Axe was able to clearly distinguish the type of demonic beast. Iron Axe’s vision had to be really amazing. Perhaps he had misinterpreted it, the Prince thought hopefully.

The demonic beast didn’t make Roland wait too long, it soon began to move closer to the walls, allowing everyone to notice its unique body.

It didn’t have the large body like the previous hybrid beasts had, but instead, it looked like an enlarged version of a cat at first glance. However, on its back, it had a pair of wings that covered its body on both sides when they weren’t spread out.

Its head looked like that of a lion, but with an extra pair of eyes –

if the extra eyes it had weren't for decoration, then it wouldn't need to turn its head to see every movement made in the area at its rear.

Carter and several hunters had loaded their flintlocks and were prepared to take the challenge.

However, the Lion Hybrid didn't attack straightaway, but instead stopped outside of the crossbow firing range, carefully taking in everything.

The distance it stopped at was within the effective range of their flintlocks, but the probability that the first salvo would hit was almost zero.

Not long after it stopped, it suddenly leaped towards the left side, spread its wings, and took off with its huge body. As Iron Axe had previously said, it could fly or glide a short distance. After it crossed over the barriers, the hybrid demonic beast quickly flew towards the western end of the walls, attacking the unguarded area of the wall.

Seeing all this, Roland's heart madly began to thump. It felt like a nightmare come true. It had observed its enemy and judged their strength, detected and attacked their weakness, proving that it possessed high intelligence – which was previously the weakness of demonic beasts. They occasionally attacked the weakness of their prey, but that was an instinct honed by many generations over thousands of years. When facing an unknown opponent, they would not judge or even more, attack their target after long analysis.

What did having intelligence mean? Humanity relied on its remarkable brain with outstanding capabilities to climb to the top of the food chain from nascent prairie life. For the moment, Roland did not dare to reflect on it. Instead, he waved his hand, and told his Chief Knight, Iron Axe and his hunter squat to follow him to shoot down the demonic beast.

It rushed towards the unmanned segment and jumped straight over the wall, easily leaving the wall behind it, and ran straight towards the residential district, disregarding the whole hunter team as if they were nothing.

“The Beast!” Roland shouted loudly, “The second militia team go to the wall and temporarily defend the wall. The first team will come with me!”

At this point, the new team had not had enough time to get trained. With this move, he could lead them away from the battle, but if the demonic beast came back, they could attack it separately. Carter led the guards to follow the prince. They were the group with the strongest individual strength and were ready to face the enemy at any time. Behind them followed Iron Axe who was leading the team of hunters equipped with guns. After entering the old areas, they couldn't see very far since their view was blocked by the houses. With narrow roads covered by snow, they had to be careful and limit their actions. Hoping to find traces of the demonic beast, Roland was afraid that there was no other possibility than to disperse his team into many small ones and let them walk through the streets.

He regretted that he didn't let Lightning follow them. If he had a witch who could investigate the situation from the air, he wouldn't need to split his team and send them into every direction.

After searching for around ten minutes, they suddenly heard some townspeople scream from deep within an alley.

Changing their direction, the team rapidly advanced toward the source of the sound. Because most of the militia were people from the old district, they immediately found their way through the many small streets, making it appear as if they were taking a walk in their backyards. Finally arriving at the source of the sound, Roland saw a man bitten into two parts with his internal organs scattered all over the ground, obviously dead.

“My God ... it's Iron Fork, I know him!” someone shouted.

“Damn, in which direction did it run?” asked another.

“Look! The beast is right over there!” Suddenly someone shouted. Shortly after the voice fell, a dark shadow swept out from the house on the right side. Accompanied by debris from scattered wood, it flew directly through the wooden wall of a hut and directly attacked the first line of militia, pawing and biting them.

Iron Axe was the first one to react. He wanted to shoot the beast with his gun, but he discovered that his view was blocked by the other members of the militia. Trying to get the right opportunity to shoot, he squeezed himself through the crowd and walked step by step in the direction toward the hybrid species. Other hunters

also discovered that they had the same problem and took their guns under their arms before jumping on the eaves or climbing up the roofs.

The hybrid species didn't care about the approaching men. It spread its wings, stood up on its hind legs and began to shake around the soldier it had bitten, spraying blood everywhere. Seeing this scene sent the crowd into a panic, causing the crowd to fearfully step back. When the hybrid species got some space it tried to jump, but in this moment a shot hit it.

Suddenly, several black flowers bloomed on the monster's fur.

The hybrid species which was hit by several lead balls roared in anger, threw away the prey in its mouth, and jumped in the direction of the hunters on the roof. When the demonic beast appeared above the crowd, it came directly into Iron Axe's view, who quickly raised his gun and aimed at the beast in front of him and pulled the trigger.

It was nearly impossible to miss a shot this close. It was even so close that the gunpowder entered the nose of the demonic beast. The velocity of the bullet wasn't reduced as it went straight through the target's eyes and penetrated its brain.

The body of the demonic beast became stiff and suddenly fell towards the ground.

Chapter 66 - Battle Of Hermes (Part 1)

As the freezing cold rain fell, it diluted the smell of blood that covered the whole of New Holy City. While in these inhuman conditions, Alicia was fighting for her life by swinging her great sword while violently panting.

It wasn't her first time participating in the battle to defend Hermes, but she had never thought that there would come a day when the New Holy city could fall.

The walls were completely destroyed.

In her whole life, Alicia had never seen such a horrible monster. A huge worm-like hybrid beast came out of the ground and pressed its body close to the glacier cliff, drilling its bone claws into the cliff and climbing up the wall step by step. Even when it had reached the top, its lower body still hadn't left the ground completely.

If it had only a huge body it wouldn't have been such a disaster, but none of them could expect what had happened next. When the huge hybrid species opened its mouth, a horde of demonic beasts rushed out and turned the wall into hell within seconds.

Originally, it could still be said that everyone in her team was calm and prepared, but when the demonic beasts attacked, everything was broken and turned into disorder. During the chaos, Alicia was separated from her squad, so she could only helplessly watch as one of her comrades was swallowed by a demonic beast.

Warm human blood and black monster blood mixed together and flowed along the grooves on the stone-paved floor.

When the horn gave the signal to retreat, Holy City's mangonels began to fire, dropping granite blocks the size of half a person from the sky, totally disregarding that many defenders were still fighting on the city walls.

Alicia could still clearly remember the image when her Captain was hit on the side of his head by a stone. When she got up from the floor and was finally able to look at him, she saw that he was embedded into the stone floor together with his armor. Folded together like a parchment, his intestines were dripping out of his opened abdomen, and his hot blood pooled into small puddles.

Alicia thought, If I hadn't thrown myself onto the ground at the last second when I discovered the stone, I'm afraid I would have ended up just like him!

As for how she exactly managed to stay alive and return from the walls, Alicia wasn't able to clearly remember it. She was only surrounded by yelling and cursing; everyone was frantically waving their arms, trying to defend themselves, but in the end, who they were hitting was unknown and it didn't matter if they hit a demonic beast or one of their own.

From her own team, which started with one hundred soldiers, only twelve survived, including herself.

"What to do next, Captain!"

“Captain Alicia!”

Since Alicia had survived, she was to take over the post of captain, as per the military regulations. If the captain was killed during the battle, the vice-captain would take over the post of captain and lead the team to continue the war.

To clear her head, Alicia bit her lips until an iron taste filled her mouth, then she finally decided, “We will go to the North Gate. If the demonic beasts want to leave the New Holy City they have to pass through that point.” Following this order meant that they gave up the area between the walls and the whole inner city, but she had no other choice. There was no place comparable to the Central Church – nothing was more important than the Hermes Cathedral.

She didn’t say it aloud, but everyone knew that with only 12 people, they couldn’t play an important part in defending the walls.

In her heart, Alicia prayed, Maybe today will be the day I will die while defending the kingdom. May God be kind to me. However, to the outside world, she shouted, “Verdict will never give up! We will march!”

“Verdict will never give up!” shouted the others in union.

Alicia’s team of twelve followed her and trotted in the direction of the Northern Gate. During their run, the sound of the war

became less and less clear under the rain and blowing wind until it completely died down.

Upon her arrival at the North Gate, Alicia saw that there was already a crowd of survivors from other squads in front of the drawbridge. Evidently, they were thinking the same thing. This made her heart feel a little better.

However, in this time of crisis, they actually let down the drawbridge. Seeing this, Alicia began to frown and walked towards the handsome warrior in charge who was wearing the standard red robe of a presiding judge. She gave him a salute, “Presiding Judge, Sir, I’m the captain of the fourth battalion advance team, Alicia Quinn! “

“I’m Tucker Thor, responsible for the defense of the North Gate. You’ve worked hard,” the man nodded acknowledgingly and said, “We have set up the emergency area at the other side of the gate, if your team has any injured you can send them there.”

“Your honor, I don’t understand why you aren’t raising the drawbridge in this time of crisis? The demonic beasts on the wall can attack us at any moment, we must ensure that they don’t conquer the inner city.”

“Calm down, captain! I know that you and your team are not afraid to sacrifice yourself for the greater cause, but that sacrifice would now be meaningless. We are still far from the Church’s point of no return,” he tried to calm Alicia down, and wiped the rain from his brow then continued, “We have to work together. If you run out of pills to expel the cold, remember to ask the

quartermaster for more.”

When the Presiding Judge reminded her, Alicia finally recognized that she was totally frozen. After she left the heat of the battlefield behind her, the cold rain and the sweat on her body mixed together, almost turning her into an ice puppet. Facing the forever blowing ice-cold wind, she couldn't suppress her body from shivering any longer.

She grasped into her sheepskin vest pocket to pull out a bag whose contents she then dumped into her hand, only to find a viscous liquid flow out. It seemed that she had accidentally damaged the pills during the battle. Finding nothing valuable, she sighed, raised her head disappointed, only to discover a new cold expelling pill in front of her.

“Take and eat it.” Tucker Thor said while reassuringly smiling at her, “When the moment comes again I may ask you for the favor to be returned.”

Alicia didn't try to be polite, she immediately took the pill and swallowed it, “Maybe we won't have a next time where we need this kind of stuff.”

“Yes, well, that would also be alright,” Tucker actually nodded in approval, “If I have to choose I would choose death instead of eating the pill.”

Just when his voice fell, a strong smell of fish washed up from Alicia's stomach. Even the stomach-churning smell of death in the

city didn't have such a disgusting taste. She didn't feel like she had eaten a pill. Instead, she thought she had eaten a mixture of flesh and blood, releasing an unbearable tingling feeling from her abdomen into her body. However, the chill faded suddenly, followed by a hot flow of blood through her whole body. Alicia's body temperature was slowly restored to her normal temperature so that the already frozen sweat began to fall down. Her head also began to release water vapor and then finally she could feel her numb toes again.

“But we won't die today,” seeing her eat the pill, the presiding judge waved his hand, ” At the moment, the God's Army of Punishment is rushing over from the Cathedral. When they arrive here, the demonic beasts won't be able to pass the North Gate. Take your people and send them to the assembly, and also remember to let them check if they still have their pills so that they don't end like you and discover that their pills were destroyed when they needed it the most.”

The God's Army of Punishment is the strongest elite army in the Church! Alicia had already heard of them long before, but she had never witnessed them fight. But ... even if the God's Army of Punishment was as powerful as the rumors said, they were still humans right? With a human body alone, no matter how hard they trained, they couldn't easily beat a crowd of mixed species.

But since the presiding judge said so, she had no way out from sending her eleven survivors to the north gate, close to the western side of the assembly.

Hundreds of troops had been gathered here after their retreat.

They were standing in groups of two or three in the cold rain, disregarding the cold water that was flowing down their cheeks. Some of them even sat on the ground with a listless look on their faces. Only a small number of people had lined up a neat row, waiting for the enemy to arrive at any possible time.

If it were still some days ago, Alicia would certainly have stood up and scolded them, but now, she was at a loss. In order to establish this New Holy City, countless people were buried here. It could even be said that each brick was built with the blood of believers and people sent by the military trial. The Bishop had often said that Hermes was built on holy ground, the Capital of the Kingdom of God.

Today, however, the Kingdom of God seemed to be falling by the hands of the demonic beasts.

“The demonic beasts are coming!” someone suddenly shouted, “take your positions to meet the enemy!”

Alicia shouted loudly to raise the spirits of the soldiers, lifted her sword, and gazed at the fast-approaching horde: “For Hermes!”

“- For the New Holy City!”

Chapter 67 - Battle Of Hermes (Part 2)

The expected final battle didn't happen.

A soldier went to a woman standing in the front line and pressed against her sword to keep her back.

“Stand back.” His voice wasn't loud, but it was still clear and strong. Alicia noticed that even after the intervention of this unknown person, her side was still holding their positions. Looking closer, she could see a “I” on the man's sleeve and under it was written “God's Army of Punishment”

She tilted her head, and not far from them a team of tall warriors rushed out of the North gate. They were all dressed in the same whole body armor, which had a silver sheen under the rain, and their red cloaks waved in the wind. However, all of them had different weapons, some were holding swords and shields while others were holding halberds or Iron Axes. After they crossed the bridge, they didn't march as a team. Instead, they spread out and went straight against the incoming demonic beasts.

What kind of tactic is this? They are creating a total mess! They faced the demonic beasts with power and speed that exceeded what was humanly possible by far. Do they want to fight the demonic beasts completely alone and without any order? Moreover, how could we let the God's Army of Punishment fight alone against the demonic beasts?

“We have to support them!”

“No,” the unknown man shook his head, looking somewhat gloomy, “You have to stay back. If you rush into the fight, you will only drag them down.”

Drag them down? Alicia angrily stared at the man, could it be that her impression of the man was wrong? Was this person just a cowardly man? She clenched the hilt of her sword, ready to immediately join the battle – although the future of the New Holy City was unknown, at the moment of their biggest crisis when they had to face the enemy, she was only allowed to stand by as others fought for them.

Before she could even take two steps forward, an incredible scene happened in front of her.

Something came flying down from the sky; its shape was just like a Fallen Angel. Its huge wings were covered in gray feathers, and completely open, it had a wingspan of more than twelve feet. It had a head like a bird, but also a pair of long horns and barbed claws capable of cutting through a warrior's breastplate like they were butter.

A vertical drop from the sky was the beast's preferred kind of attack, covert and difficult to defend against. Even when holding a heavy shield, soldiers wouldn't be able to defend themselves; the huge impact force would shatter their arms and crush their rib cages. Many soldiers had already died from their attack without any chance to retaliate. Their only chance to shake it off was by throwing themselves towards the ground, diving away from the dangerous blow.

But the members of God's Army of Punishment didn't think about dodging. A warrior wearing silver armor took a firm stand against the enemy, and at the last moment he reached out with his hands and grasped the incoming claws with his hands. The impact force was so strong that a screeching sound could be heard.

The warrior bent his right foot while straightening his left foot, stretching out his arms and forming so a straight line with his body, creating a counterpart with enough power to repel the impact. When another warrior saw that the demonic beast came to a stop in the air, he threw a javelin. The javelin was so fast that Alicia could only see a silver flash. It precisely went through the beast's head, directly shattering it at the moment of impact.

The warrior who was still holding the beast's claws threw the twitching body away. His arms were abnormally bent, it seemed that the bones in his arms had been broken. Apparently, he hadn't survived the impact without any injuries, but he calmly took his iron ax and began to kill demonic beasts again.

They were only relying on manpower to withstand this herd of monsters. Seeing this, Alicia could not believe her eyes. Hundreds of soldiers of the God's Army of Punishment poured into the herd of demonic beasts. Due to their red cloaks, it seemed as if they had merged into a powerful flood of blood, abruptly stopping the enemy from moving forward. She now understood what the soldier meant when he said they would "drag" them down. These warriors seemed to have the ability of ten men. Each of them had the strength, agility and reaction time comparable to that of a demonic beast – no, they seemed to be even stronger. In front of them, ordinary demonic beasts seemed to be almost like little

children.

“They are too much!” Alicia could feel joy from the bottom of her heart. With such a strong group of warriors, Hermes’ Cathedral would never fall! “Ah, yes, I never asked you for your name, my name is Alicia Quinn, and what is your name, Captain? It appears that you already knew the fighting abilities of the God’s Army of Punishment?”

The Captain looked Alicia directly in the eyes, his look was as freezing cold as the rain. When he finally responded, he didn’t give her his name, he only muttered: “My brother is a member of the God’s Army of Punishment.”

“It appears that we will win.” said Bishop Mayne, who stood at the topmost level of the Cathedral, looking out of the window. Here, at the highest point of the New Holy City, he used a telescope to look over more than half of the battlefield. “Let the mangonels stop their attack, our army will soon start an attack to reclaim the city walls.”

“You know that winning wasn’t the main point, right?” Suddenly, another voice could be heard. The possessor of the voice wore the same gold clothes like Bishop Mayne, but the only difference was that his voice was much older, “The important part of this fight was that the armies of the four Kingdoms were destroyed.”

“That’s right. This way, their defensive lines will be rendered

useless.” said the last person. She seemed to be the youngest person in this trio, appearing to be around her early thirties and also the only woman within the three archbishops. “Their standing army of more than 5,000 well-equipped and well-trained soldiers and also nearly a thousand knights were immediately taken out of the picture. They will need four to five years to rebuild their troops. Ah ...” She let out a moan, and happily continued, “It’s really such a wonderful day.”

“But in order to achieve this purpose, we had to sacrifice many of our own soldiers, they were the backbone of the Church,” Mayne sighed, “If this wasn’t the fastest plan to achieve our desired goal, I really didn’t want to sent all of our soldiers into this purgatory.”

The old man stroked his beard thoughtfully and then said, “We had no other choice, the wild beasts had appeared, which was described in the Holy Book. Following the descriptions in the book, there is not much time left. So, if we do not unify the entire continent and force all the Kingdom under one rule, only death will await us.”

“Destruction is actually nothing bad.” said the woman while laughing frivolously, “Humans are always greedy, have malicious intent, and only see nothing but personal profit. Under the name and banner of righteousness they do much worse things than even the demonic beasts, maybe even the devil from hell would treat us better than we humans each other.”

“Heather!” shouted the man angrily while pulling his beard, “Your comments can be counted as treason and heresy against the will of God, do you want to die?!”

“You don’t need to take it to your heart, Tayfun,” Heather shrugged disregarding, her face full of disapproval, “The person in charge of this tribunal is me, not you. Besides, do you really think that it’s important to God whether we survive or not? How do you know that he is more caring than the devil?”

“You ...!”

“Enough! Tayfun! Heather!” shouted Mayne in displeasure, “That is enough for today. I need to report to the Pope, you both will go now and complete the mission.”

After they left, Mayne stood in front of the window overlooking the north – with the Mountain of despair in the background, a never ending snow-covered winter land, and in the west, laid the barbarian territory. There laid the beginning of everything.

He knew that Bishop Tayfun was right, the soldiers in the God’s Army of Punishment were too precious. To join, one not only needed to be faithful but also a strong willpower to survive the transformation afterwards. After nearly a century of accumulation, the Church was only able to save one thousand soldiers. If they wanted to fight the demons, this number was not enough.

But the North could only support so many warriors. If they wanted more warriors, they had no other choice than to unify the continent.

Of course, Bishop Heather was also correct. She served as the Church's judge, holding trials for thousands of witches. Whether they were good or bad witches, they were all gathered and killed with the most savage methods.

The higher your position was within the church, the more you could clearly feel, God wasn't good but he also wasn't bad.

"How do you know that he cares more for us than the devil?" When he thought about Heather's words, Mayne couldn't help himself from laughing out aloud. I am afraid that only she has the talent to annoy Tayfun until he has nothing left to say. God didn't bless the world, nor did he show concern and care for the devil.

God will only love the winning party.

Chapter 68 - Funeral

The funeral was held within an area south of Border Town, on the edge of the wasteland.

To call it a wasteland wasn't correct. Van'er didn't know when, but one day someone had built a small stone fence around this area. Since then, no one showed any interest in the piece of land. The wall was covered with thick snow, and when observed from afar it looked like it laid under a coat of silver. Although the wall wasn't high, it was easy to step over it. Whenever Van'er saw this wall, he couldn't help himself from thinking about the city wall – they both had the same color and shape.

Until now, he had only heard from the traveling merchants about such a ritual. When an important member of the aristocracy or royal family died, the deceased's family would go to the cemetery together. There they would play some sad music, and everyone would be allowed to mourn the dead until the coffin was buried underground. The greater the deceased's noble status was, the greater the funeral would be.

Even after their deaths, they still get better treatment than us commoners, thought Van'er enviously. He asked himself, what will happen to my body after my death? Will they just dig a hole at the edge of the forest and throw me into it? Also, no one knows when the Months of the Demons will end, so there will be no guarantee that no demonic beast will come and dig out my body to eat it.

To the people of Border Town, death wasn't something

unknown. In particular, each winter when they were forced to live in Longsong Stronghold as refugees and live in shacks, many of them died of hunger and cold or died of diseases and injuries. That was already the norm. Nobody had the time and power to grieve for the deceased, the question of where to get the next piece of bread to eat was much more important.

But today, His Highness actually wanted to hold a funeral for a soldier!

I heard he unfortunately fell during the pursuit of the mixed species, his head was bitten off along with half of his body.

Van'er knew this unlucky guy, he could be considered as one of the known faces of the old district. No one knew his real name, everyone just called him Ali. Van'er knew that Ali left behind a wife and two children; the older one was around six and the younger one had just learned to walk.

Under normal circumstances, the family would be finished now. The widow could still find a new man to live with, but what man would also take in the two stepchildren? Because of this, many children were thrown on the street to let them fend for themselves. Most of these children would then go to a bar to attract customers and sell their flesh and die from strange diseases in the end.

But His Highness really seems intent on honoring the promises he gave during the militia recruitment. When a soldier falls during the war, his family wouldn't only get his full payment, but also extra compensation. What had His Highness called it? Van'er had

to think for a moment. Ah ... yes, he had called it a pension. And the money his wife gets is actually five gold royals! In addition, His Highness will provide them with enough food and charcoal every month, which means that even if his wife doesn't go to work, she will have enough to care for herself and her children. Well, it could be that these are only empty promises, but at least the gold royals are real. He had seen how His Highness had given the money to the Chief Knight, who later gave the money to Ali's wife.

Hell, could it be that I'm a little envious of Ali? No, no. Van'er shook his head again and again, trying to expel this stupid thought. With my talent I don't have to sell myself so cheaply to care for my wife ... after all, it is most likely that she will become someone else's wife then.

After giving out the money, His Highness gave a short but captivating speech. In particular, the phrase "while protecting his loved ones and the innocent, we will always remember him," made the blood burn hotter within him. So that was the way it was, he thought, no wonder that in the recent days apart from bread and silver royals, I always thought to follow a greater goal – at least during this winter, we will be able to survive by relying on our own power instead of hoping for the Longsong Stronghold's charity.

The last part was the burial. Ali's coffin was let down into the previously dug pit. Then, the Chief Knight made all the militia members line up in front of the grave. Regardless of whether they were from the first team or the replacement, everyone had to step in front of the grave and throw in a shovel of earth into the grave. While queuing, the 200 hundred militia members stepped into their already all too familiar four columns. When it was Van'er's

turn, he suddenly felt that the shovel had become somewhat heavy as he took it. He could feel that all the members around him were watching every movement of his, making him slow down.

When he finally stood to the side, Van'er could see with his own eyes that the next person in line was now under the same pressure he previously felt.

The tombstone was a rectangular piece of white stone, and there were also some words written on it, but he couldn't read them. Ali wasn't the first one who was buried in this place. Next to his grave stood another similar tombstone, covered by snow. When Van'er was leaving, he saw the other new Vice-Captain Brian standing in front of a stone, slowly pouring a pot of ale on the tombstone.

Van'er couldn't help but think, if this becomes my last destination, it wouldn't be so bad.

“Your Highness,” during the return back to the castle, Carter suddenly began to talk, “what you did...”

“Was inappropriate?” continued Roland.

“No,” Carter thought for a moment, but in the end he only shook his head and answered, “I don't know how to say it, but I think no one has ever treated his employees like this – they have neither a title nor a family background, and most of them don't even have a last name.”

“But in the end, do you think what I did was right?” asked Roland once more.

“Well...” Roland smiled and laughed, he certainly knew that this kind of ceremony had a strong appeal to Carter, who was also always fighting for and protecting him. When people start to think who they are fighting for and why they are going to war, such a ceremony could be good motivation. For Carter, this change had an even greater meaning, now this kind of honor wasn't just a privilege for the nobility. During these times, the common people could already get the same training and teaching the nobility got, but now the civilians could also receive the honor of defending their homeland. The doubled sense of achievement was absolutely inexplicable.

Of course, the introduction of the public funeral was just the beginning, Roland thought, he still had many ideas that could be used to enhance the collective sense of honor, such as using flags, playing military songs, establishing a heroic example and so on.

It wasn't possible to produce such spirit out of thin air. Roland would only be able to increase their sense of belonging step by step and always instilling the idea, until it gradually took effect. In order to ensure that the pension project was set in motion and reliable, Roland had arranged all of it by himself. Within the Town Hall, he had set up a group of people who were responsible for the payment of the food and charcoal.

The further along Roland got on his way of upgrading Border Town, the heavier the pressure became on his shoulders. Even so,

it seemed that the mining project and upgrading the people's living conditions was on the right track. With sufficient grain reserves, so far no one had starved or frozen to death. Compared to other towns and cities, this seemed to be a miracle, even in Graycastle, some people had to die during the winter. Even knowing all this, Roland thought that Border Town was still lacking in many places.

His goals were much higher than this, but his range of operation had already reached his limit. His Assistant Minister Barov and his more than a dozen apprentices who he had brought with him were now controlling all the financial and administrative management of Border Town. If Roland wanted to further expand the department, just recruiting some management staff wasn't possible. Roland had already asked Barov if he still knew some protégées, colleague or favorite pupils, but the answer he got poured cold water on him: "Even if I knew some, they wouldn't want to come. After all, Your Highness should know what kind of reputation you have right?"

Well, that sounds kind of reasonable, but it was really depressing.

When they were back in the castle backyard, Nightingale emerged out of the fog immediately giving Wendy, who was standing in front of the shed, a warm hug. Lightning was walking around the unfinished steam engine, looking at it, but when she saw Roland, she immediately pestered Roland to assemble and install the autonomous machine.

Seeing all this, Roland thought that all his hard work was worth it.

Chapter 69 - Cannon System

Four days later in the backyard.

Two deep holes were dug in the ground. Each hole was in a circular shape, and the deeper it went, the narrower its radius became. At ground level, its diameter was around 40 cm but its deepest part expanded to only 26 cm. These holes were the molds that Roland intended to use to produce his cannon prototypes. The inner walls of the holes were baked and hardened by Anna. She burned it so long that its surface was without any flaws, just like a shell. She began to harden the shell at the bottom and took all the air bubbles and scum with her as she moved upwards. During history, there were several sizes of cannons; Roland roughly remembered that the so-called six pound and eight pound cannons got their name from the weight of their shells. Roland's first step for producing a cannon was to produce several twelve-pound balls, and then calculate their sizes according to the diameter and the wall thickness of the cannon's shell.

In the absence of measurement tools, Roland simply created his own custom standard. He took an iron rod and separated it into many small parts with the width of the smallest phalanx of his ring finger, hoping to come close to one centimeter. After that, he created many copies of the iron rods.

The diameter of a twelve-pound iron ball, when measured with the new iron ruler, was around twelve centimeters. Because of this, the thinnest wall of the shell had to be four centimeters, and the rear end which was used as the detonation chamber would need to be seven centimeters thick to prevent self-explosion. As for length, there were many different kinds of cannons, like the

cannons used on battleships, modern tanks, or antique front-loading artillery, so he really did not know which to choose.

Taking into account that the shorter the tube, the lighter the cannon would be and the more materials could be saved. Roland dismissively waved his hand, I will just build a cannon with a length of 1.5 meters; if the tests results aren't satisfactory, I will adjust the length later.

When the cannon was originally invented, it was built with a wooden core and strengthened with iron rings, just like a barrel. Roland still remembered that this kind of cannon had the risk of air leaking and self-explosion, thus it would be better to mold the cannon bodies completely at once. When drilling out the cannon with a steam engine, there was no difference in producing a 6-pound cannon or a 12-pound cannon.

The so-called caliber was just a concept to differentiate between their sizes. If the muzzle was bigger, it became a 12 pounder. Everything beyond that couldn't be used as field artillery. But the exact weight of the shells or the cannon balls wasn't important as long as they shoot in a straight line. After all, he was only getting ideas from history and not replicating it.

Roland took a deep breath, then he gave Anna the signal to "start now". The latter nodded her head, took a steel ingot, and placed it over the hole. Under the power of her green flame, the ingot quickly turned red and began to melt, forming a small waterfall out of molten iron which flowed into the hole. The molten iron glowed red-orange and became so bright that it was hard to look at. In order to protect Anna's eyes, Roland specially set up a

support frame at the edge of the hole. She just had to take a good position first and then she could lean against the support frame to produce the cannon without looking into the hole.

The ingots were normally only used up slowly. After all, Anna alone couldn't start the era of hot steel, but producing a small batch wasn't a big problem – the most difficult problem to solve was to hold the temperature at the same level, but with Anna's help he was able to produce a small batch of excellent quality steel.

This was also the reason why Roland dared to produce a cannon of the size of five meters. Compared to the cannons produced out of bronze or iron, the cannon made out of steel was clearly much stronger. Even if Roland built the cannon in the wrong size, the probability that it would self-explode was much smaller.

The amount of molten steel was continuing to rise within the hole, but the numbers of ingots were also becoming less and less. Seeing this, Roland couldn't help himself but feel some heartache. In the end, he only could wait until the time when he would be able to build some blast furnaces on his territory. The number of steel and iron ingots a noble could produce was one of the criteria used to measure strength and power during this time.

When the two molds were filled, Anna's cheeks were bright red because of her effort. So, Roland took out his handkerchief and gently wiped the sweat from her nose away. Unable to accept this embarrassing care, Anna showed some resistance at the beginning, but after a few seconds she obediently closed her eyes and let Roland take care of her.

Her face had a red shine from the light of the molten steel, causing Roland to think about taking a bite out of her. However, when he looked further down her neck, her exposed, slender clavicle entered his view. The both of them were so close together that Roland could smell her delicate fragrance.

“Ahem, well ...” Roland embarrassedly took the handkerchief away while trying to control his restless emotions, “that was everything for today. Well done! I will tell the kitchen to specially prepare a pepper steak for you.”

Now wasn't the right time, Roland thought, if I take action now, everyone will think that I am taking advantage of a vulnerable person. I will have to wait until she is completely free...

When Anna opened her eyes, she could feel that Roland had wiped away all her sweat, but his face seemed to be redder than before. She gently nodded to Roland and expressed her thanks.

In the next few days, Roland traveled between the castle and the North Slope Mine several times.

In addition to cannons, he also needed to make a sufficient amount of boring tools.

The production method of the boring tools for gun barrels and cannon barrels were quite similar. After their removal from the mold, Anna would heat them up again, so that they could be

processed with a hammer. It was quite different from producing an ordinary knife. At first glance, it looked like a blunt iron rod. However, the only difference was that it had a gap on its head, which was used to discharge metal debris. At the last step, the iron was quenched to increase its hardness.

The production method was quite different from modern high precision drills. After all, Roland only needed them to drill into iron. Taking their high wear rate into account, Roland and Anna produced five boring tools within a week. Thanks to this boring tools and the usage of the steam engine for drilling – the production of the gun barrels rapidly increased from 2 each month to ten each day.

After everything was ready, the miners would dig out the two cannon embryos, then clean the scum from the surface and transport them onto the carriage smithy.

For the production of these two cannon embryos, nearly all of Roland's steel ingots were consumed, a priceless test. So Carter and his whole guard were responsible for the protection of the transport, which let the Chief Knight feel a little superfluous. Who would steal so much inflexible stuff?

According to the requirements of the Prince, the blacksmith began to polish and flatten the appearance of the embryo, after the grindstone. When they had finished it, the embryos were delivered into the castle backyard. At this time they just looked like two solid iron bars with dark gray and rounded appearances, exuding a heavy metallic luster.

Roland couldn't wait to start the drilling, so together with Carter he brought the embryo to the right place, and placed the tip of the cutter head at the top of the steel bar.

With a face full of expectation, Roland pulled the valve on the steam engine. The boring tool slowly began to operate, but not much later it was already running at a steady speed.

“Begin!” the Prince loudly shouted.

Hearing this, the Chief Knight pushed the sliding base down so that the boring tool came in contact with the embryo. When the tip of the boring tool came into contact with the embryo, a harsh noise which even overshadowed the noise of the steam engine could be heard. As lubricant they used lard, which was packed into the drilling, coming out of the wire as black foam. The onlooking witches withdrew from the wooden shed, and only Lightning insisted on staying. It seemed to her that looking at this machine was much more beautiful than any landscape.

Chapter 70 - Spy (Part 1)

“Groundhog” Kohl was somewhat anxious as he looked out of the window.

In this hell-like place, it was snowing without end. He thought that the sky looked exactly like his grandmother’s sheets which she hadn’t washed for years, both of them dirty and gray. Even though he couldn’t see the sun, he still had another way to judge the hour.

That ‘way’ was the militia training; as long as the weather permitted, the militia would run every morning (at 8 am) around the town square. The group of idiots had already started it a month before the Months of the Demons, but they were still doing it even now.

Don’t these people know that it’s most important to save as much strength as possible during the winter so when the time comes that they truly need to run, they won’t need to pray to God to lend them stronger legs?

However, thanks to this bunch of idiots, he could now determine the right time to leave.

That’s right, Kohl wanted to flee this possessed town! Although he was ordered by the 2nd Prince to stay in Border Town to observe everything that the 4th Prince did and then send the gathered intelligence back to Valencia, But now, he had reached a point where he didn’t want to stay any longer.

His thoughts were, I'm afraid that in less than two weeks I, along with this town's inhabitants will all become the Devil's sacrifices.

This wasn't him being paranoid!

Since the beginning of winter, one strange thing after another had happened. Perhaps other people weren't aware of it – which to him, wasn't surprising.

These townspeople don't have any experience; they're all country bumpkins! As long as they have enough to eat, they don't care even if the heavens were to fall down on them. But I'm different, I'm "Groundhog" Kohl! Because my skills in stealing information and snooping for news are the best, His Highness Timothy himself hired me for this job.

One night, when he had climbed over the city wall, he had discovered a strange weapon that was able to knock down demonic beasts, but of course, this wasn't the most startling discovery.

The 4th Prince was openly working together with a witch!

Merciful God, could there be anything more unholy than this? There can't be any other explanation, the Devil is controlling the 4th Prince!

Even if the Prince only wanted to have a taste of a witch's flesh, he would surely only do that if he was hidden in his castle. It wasn't the first time for Kohl to hear that a noble had become

addicted to the taste of witches – after all, there were many aristocrats with strange habits, but it turned into a completely different matter when it was done in public.

But this wasn't a delusion; he had seen it with his own eyes!

Based on the principle “those who are paid have to do the work”, every day, when the snow wasn't too high, Kohl walked towards the nearby city walls. There, he could often see the figure of the 4th Prince, doing his work. In the beginning, he had asked himself the question, what gave the incompetent and spoiled Prince the courage to stay in Border Town during the Months of the Demons, not piss in his own pants in terror, and run back towards Longsong Stronghold? But now he finally understood; the Prince had already been replaced by the Devil!

He had been at his hiding place when the big demonic beast burst through the wall, which was then killed by the Devil's Thunder. The following rush of the demonic beasts was held back by the flames summoned by the witch. And it was exactly this witch who later threw herself into the arms of the Prince!

He also had heard constant rumors from his neighbors. They talked about a witch who supposedly had the ability to heal wounds. The witch was said to have cured an injured boy; supposedly she had also cured the broken foot of the old lady from across the street.

But to Kohl, this was only a blasphemous rumor! How could someone accept treatment from a witch? What would be the difference between them and all the witches who accepted the

Devil's corruption?

However, the last straw for Kohl was two days ago, when he saw a witch flying two rounds around the Prince's castle and then going down into his backyard. What did the Church's father always say? A witch will only get her powers after she had fallen to the Devil's temptation. And by now he had already seen a witch with the power to summon flames and another witch with the ability to fly around the castle. Together with the rumors about the witch with healing ability, he came to the conclusion that at least three witches had gathered!

Undoubtedly, the Devil has turned the castle into his own lair, and now he's gradually beginning to turn the townsfolk into his minions. I have to leave this town as soon as possible! Anyway, I'm holding the alchemic formula for the gray powder used to build the city walls in my hands. As long as I deliver this to the 2nd Prince, not only will I not be punished, but I might even receive a reward.

From day to day, Kohl regretted more and more that he hadn't left when the other aristocracy had left Border Town for Longsong Stronghold.

But now, if he wanted to leave this place, the way above ground wasn't a viable possibility. During the whole of winter it would continue to snow, making it impossible to either walk or ride to Longsong Stronghold. His only way was by booking passage on a merchant ship from Willow Town.

According to Kohl's observations, every first day of the month, a boat from Willow Town would deliver food to Border Town. After

two to three hours of loading and unloading, it would set sail again and leave the harbor. He only had this small time frame to get on board. Otherwise, he could only wait until the next month.

Today was finally the start of the month's first day.

"One, two, three, four, one, two, three, four" Just then, Kohl heard the already familiar slogan again. He could see a group of men in brown leather uniforms running in full spirit. If Kohl hadn't seen through the Devil's plot, this would have been a remarkable scene to look at.

Finally, it's time to leave, he thought.

After putting on his fur coat and fastening his belt, Kohl moved away from his cabin. At this moment a neighbor who sat outside of his cabin saw Kohl and greeted him, "Good morning. Where are you walking to so early in the morning?"

Kohl had to acknowledge that, although Border Town was now controlled by the Devil, thanks to this, the life of these souls became a lot better compared to their former lives. They even dared to dry their fish outside of their houses – after all, if the people were hungry enough, even if the fish were as hard as a stone, they would still try swallowing it raw.

However, Kohl didn't respond to the man's question. Instead, he took a probing look towards the militia and when he saw them running around a corner; he went straight towards the pier. Residents here regarded him as the younger brother of Iron

Paddle, who came from the Fallen Dragon Mountain range to visit his family – of course, all of this was nonsense. Previously he had caught the real Iron Paddle, questioned him for his name and address and then killed him. He had then taken Paddle's clothes and masqueraded himself as his brother. This was just one casually created identity, so Kohl didn't care whether they believed in it or not.

Within the last few days, the fallen snow had been cleared from the streets until there was nearly no snow beneath his shoes. He kept a constant speed so that he could save as much stamina as possible – as for the footprints he left behind, he wasn't worried. Within a day the snow would cover all of his footprints. Maybe even by the time he reached Valencia, they would still be in the dark about his whereabouts.

As he approached the marina, Kohl saw the long-awaited merchant boat.

Under the watchful eyes of the guards, bags of wheat were being carried out of the storage room. Kohl checked the contents of his pockets again, inside he had two gold royals and sixteen silver royals which was all of the possessions he had. Seeing that there were six guards, Kohl thought that it wouldn't be enough even though he had two gold royals. So, his only way out would be bribing the porter. As soon as the unloaded goods could provide him with protection from being seen, he would immediately go towards the porter, and ask him whether he would like to have a good future life or if he wanted to get knocked out. As long as he could get on board, Kohl believed, that in all likelihood, the temptation of the gold royals would be enough and the captain would take him away.

At the moment Kohl was ready to take action, he heard shouts from behind him.

His heart immediately became gloomy, when he turned around he discovered that some militia was rushing towards him, coming from all directions and leaving him no way to escape.

When seeing that there was no way to escape, Kohl immediately put his hands in the air and fell to his knees. One of his mottos was to not show pointless resistance, as long as he spat out all of his employer's information, he would be safe, or probably they would even... try to hire him for an even higher price as a double agent.

As long as he got money, he would do anything; this was the principle of "Groundhog."

But there was one point he didn't understand. How were they able to find him?

Chapter 71 - Spy (Part 2)

In addition to starting the fire in the fireplace, Barov had also placed a mahogany candelabra on the table. This candelabra had one base which split into four branches. One in the middle, which was also the highest, and three branches which enclosed the middle branch in a triangular shape. A burning candle was placed on each branch, and the candelabra looked like a bright mountain as they burned.

The room was full of the scent of pine oil, resembling a sweet and rotten wood odor, making people feel drowsy. However, within Border Town, Barov could not ask for more. In this land of poverty, he couldn't ask for anything exquisite or anything elegant. Here, everyone was happy if they had a shelter over their head, so Barov could call himself quite lucky with his big room.

His room within the castle wasn't far from the courtyard, as it was the location of the former Lord's city hall. Of course, when the Lord left the castle, he took his whole staff with him, so now the room belonged only to Barov.

From time to time, he could hear the rustle of voices from within the castle and the howling wind from outside the window, giving him the impression of two different worlds. The old wooden table Barov was writing at was full of books and scrolls. On both sides, he had arranged a table, forming a "U". Usually, the tables weren't occupied by anyone. He only used them to display his manuscripts. When necessary, he would summon his disciples, and place them at one of his side tables. There, they could organize his information or write the first draft for an official document.

The candles in the lamp were already changed three times. Beside changing the candles, Barov didn't stop his hand from swiftly working through the documents. To him, time was a very precious thing. There was already a stack of documents at hand, waiting for him to deal with, plus, His Highness' proposed expenditures would also still need to be reviewed.

Barov's average work time was 10 hours per day, but he didn't feel tired at all. On the contrary, this was where he could show off all his skills, so he had the feeling that his body had inexhaustible energy. This is how it should be, he thought, no one is talking around me, all of my apprentices are self-responsible, and no one is holding the others back or creating a mess. As long as they fulfill the Prince's command, he can handle the specific administration process without outside help.

If the Prince's commands could only be a little more normal, while Barov thought this he gnawed on his lips regretfully. For example, at present, all of Roland's official correspondences were sealed with his seal like the last one he sent to Willow Town. In it, Roland asked for additional administration staff and a brig. The answer note said: With the price you offered, you cannot hire the captain, helmsman, and the sailors.

After reading, Barov was left dumbfounded, without these people, how would they deliver the boat? Would they walk back after delivering the brig? Also, why do we need to buy a boat? This was the most crucial point. At the moment, the trade between Border Town and Willow Town was stable. Even after the end of winter, if we want to expand the ore trade, we would only need to send a notice, and they would immediately increase the number of

vessels for the trade. It just isn't worth it to buy a boat; the town's pier is just for parking and unloading, it isn't usable or maintenance. And without sailors who could care for it, it won't be long before we have to abandon it. Was it another of His Highness' crazy moments?

As for the first request, contrary to what one might expect, Barov could understand it.

At present, there was no one with any free time in the whole town hall, Barov had already brought more than ten people over to supervise the business, they were responsible for the statistical reports and settling income and expenditure. Barov himself was responsible for the administrative and legal work – which was obviously illogical. Since His Highness wanted to separate these sectors, it was necessary to expand the size of the employees in the city hall. Under normal circumstances, the assistant minister didn't want to let go of so many responsibilities. Every person who had this much power in his own hands would feel a sense full of satisfaction. He wanted to be like his teacher, the kingdom's finance minister. He was the only one responsible for Graycastle's finances and was also the King's right hand.

Ahem, well, now only Border Town is important, added Barov in his heart. Although Roland had promised him that he wanted to fight for the throne, there was still a long way to go. Barov didn't know when it happened, but today he actually contended the 4th Prince as a true candidate for the throne. Compared with the past it was the difference between heaven and sky, previous he had thought that such an ignorant and dandy character could never become the king.

But since he came to Border Town, he got one surprise after another. Up to now, Border Town was still able to survive by only relying on the militia. The fact that they were still able to hold was really praiseworthy. Don't even mention all the strange stuff he invented, the fact that he could handle all these people is totally unlike the 4th Prince. He seems more like the Devil who knows everything.

At this time, he heard a thunderous sound at his door, making him stop his work and answer, "Come in."

The door was opened by one of his favorite disciples, "Filler" Yarrow.

"Respected teacher, we have caught another "mouse." "

"Oh? Did you already question him?"

"He said that Timothy sent him. During the body search, we found cement powder, some coins and a letter on him." Yarrow walked up and handed Barov the leather-wrapped envelope, "As for the other information, we are still interrogating him. Teacher, how to deal... "

"Just like the previous times, write down all the answers into the book and then hang the convicted spy." Ordered Barov.

"Yes," Yarrow saluted and said, "This disciple will leave now."

When the door was closed again, Barov didn't continue to work. Instead, he went back to his table, and opened the sealed parchment with his letter opener, taking out the letter.

The fourth ... he thought.

Long before the Months of the Demons had started, Roland Wimbledon had summoned him and discussed this matter.

His Royal Highness believed that when the cement powder, the new snow powder and the witches were revealed, his siblings' hidden spies would be unable to bear to not let their master know about it, which would be the best time to eliminate the mice. Thinking about it, Barov had to agree with the first part of his statement, but not the second part. In his view, Border Town had more than two thousand residents, which made it impossible to control everyone. They just didn't have the manpower, and the people they had weren't trained for it.

However, His Highness seemed to not see his points and said, "Why should we need so many people? Every person within Border Town will be our eyes."

Barov couldn't believe that the Prince believed his own words and let this ignorant, stupid and ordinary monitor for everyone to find the mouse? That's just impossible!

But the people showed him that he was wrong.

When Roland ordered the first census after the beginning of the winter, he gave special orders to the people who had lived for five years or longer within Border Town: Surely Longsong Stronghold had tried to drive Border Town into bankruptcy after their attempt to burn the food, but they had not given up yet. Instead, their spies sent should still be lurking around. Most of them should be disguised as relatives of townspeople or merchants who were too late to evacuate, always on the lookout for an opportunity to harm Border Town. So if anyone saw a suspicious character, they should immediately report them to the City Hall. Once it was verified, they would receive a reward of 25 silver royals.

The results of this move showed that it was extraordinarily effective.

Naturally, in the beginning, they received some false positives, but it was not long before they found the first mouse and thus arrested them.

Barov remembered that Roland said this awkward sentence proudly.

What did he say again? He thought for a moment, yes ... “Let the enemy sink into the bottomless sea of fighting against commoners.”

This sentence had a really strange syntax; the assistant minister shook his head and spread the letter within his hands.

The person named “Groundhog” repeatedly stressed that various

phenomena showed that the 4th Prince, Roland Wimbledon, had been replaced by the devil, and Barov could clearly read his fear between the lines. When Barov thought about how the Prince used several people, he actually could not help but feel a glimmer of recognition. He took a deep breath, and then he held the letter above the candle, the former of which soon caught fire and turned into ashes.

Since he didn't fear the God's Stone of Retaliation, he couldn't be controlled by the devil, right?

Chapter 72 - Holding Court As A King

Timothy Wimbledon sat on the throne, rubbing the scepter in his hand while overlooking the ministers within the pantheon.

This is the feeling I have striven for, he thought, instead of being held back in Valencia, where I had to oversee the endless tangle between merchants, who only fought for their own benefit.

He stopped the rubbing of the scepter, and began tapping its end on the floor, letting it sound through the hall. When all eyes were focused on him, he nodded and ordered, “You may begin.”

“Your Majesty, I have something important to report.” The first to step up was Knight Weimar, nicknamed “Sir Ironheart,” who was responsible for everything regarding King City’s defense.

“Speak.”

“Can the witch hunts be temporarily stopped?” Your Majesty, the recent raids have become more and more excessive! I heard that yesterday, several women were taken out of their houses, were arrested, and later assaulted in the dungeons. One of them even died while being in prison! Later it turned out that none of them were actually witches! Now panic has broken out within the outer city. If it goes on like this, I’m afraid there will be a significant number of fugitives.”

Timothy frowned, he was the one who had ordered the witch hunt. He was still unable to unwrap the truth about his father’s

death, and was still unable to believe that his father would commit suicide. The strange smile his father had on his face before he killed himself caused him to feel especially creepy. His father wore the God's Stone of Retaliation of the highest quality, furthermore the Church had also confirmed that the stone was genuine, but this didn't mean that no witches were involved.

Even if the theory was strange, he hadn't a better theory than it was plotted by witches.

He looked toward Langley, the officer and his pawn in training responsible for the raids. The latter immediately stood up and said, "Your dearest Majesty, it was just an accident, and I have already severely punished the relevant personnel," he started cracking his fingers, "the warden, castellan, and guards have been given ten lashes and have been fined twenty-five silver royals."

"One woman dead and three extremely brutally tortured, and you think some slashes and some money will be enough as compensation?" asked Sir Weimar in a cold voice, "And who gave you the right to judge? Was it the former Prime Minister Vic or the Minister of Justice Lord Padro? "

"Your Majesty! We are currently facing extraordinary times, so I had to act fast," Langley claimed innocence and fell to his knees, "When ignoring some minor setbacks, the raids have shown great success. We have already caught at least fifteen witches who were lurking in King City and now they are currently being tortured, so you will soon be able to know whether your father – no, I mean, if they have planned a conspiracy."

Timothy glared at him, you idiot, you almost told everyone our true intentions. While the ministers standing in this hall had most probably already guessed that he was the true mastermind behind the plot, but the outside world was only allowed to know his version, where Prince Gerald killed the King, this point wasn't permitted to be overthrown.

“Fifteen witches?” Sir Steelheart sneered with contempt, “Well, it seemed that King City has already become a witch stronghold. A few years ago the Church had started a witch hunt in the forest east of King City, but they were only able to catch six witches. It seems that your men are much stronger than the Church's own men.”

“You...!” Langley shouted loudly but was immediately interrupted by Timothy.

“Enough!” Langley is such a fool, just like the other fools under my control, thought Timothy, who was annoyed that no one with skills was available. If he hadn't needed him at the beginning for the battle of the throne, he wouldn't have promoted this fool. Even if you want to take false credits, don't make up such unbelievable numbers. I'm afraid these 15 women had to face the same treatment as the unlucky commoners. He didn't want to involve the Church, but at the moment he saw no other way, so he ordered, “You will go to the Church, and pay a priest to come over, so he can confirm the identity of these fifteen women. Until then, stop the torture. Afterwards you will let the priest confirm every woman you catch! If I later hear that you people have not followed my orders, I will throw you into the city moat to feed the fish!”

“Uh, yes, Your Majesty.” Langley confirmed, “I will immediately follow your orders!”

After Langley had left the hall, Timothy turned toward the finance minister, “If there is anyone else who has been wronged together with the previous three, they will get three gold royals each. Regarding the women died in prison, send the money to the family, “he paused,” multiple times.”

“As you wish.” Said the Finance Minister as he nodded in confirmation.

“Your Majesty is very kind.” Praised Sir Weimar while saluting the Prince.

“Next question.” Timothy waited for a moment, but when he saw that no one had something, he said, “Since no one has a new issue, I will start with my own.” He looked at the Minister for Diplomacy, “Yoshua ‘Sir Bullet,’ it has already one month since the recall order was issued, but no one has come back to King City. Tell me, what news do you have to say?”

Sir Bullet came from the Flynn Family and held his position for thirty years. He had gray hair, an old face, and stood already with one foot within the grave. He cleared his throat, “Your Majesty, your 3rd sister Garcia Wimbledon has yet to answer. Your 4th brother Roland Wimbledon has replied. The letter said that, when his people are safe at the end of the Months of the Demons, he will consider his return...”

“And what else?” asked Timothy, annoyed.

“He addressed the letter to Prince Timothy and not King Timothy.”

Timothy couldn't stop himself from sneered loudly in disdain. He is as ignorant as before, such a hopeless brother. He thought, if you intend to come back, you will take your instruction from me as your new King. I will give you a good place to live, just like the pampered prince you are. If you don't come back, you won't get an easy death. It will be the same as playing chess, regardless what you do I will have the right answer.

“Just let him be,” Timothy dismissively waved his hand, “What is with my fifth sister?”

“Your Majesty, she ... is gone.” answered Sir Bullet ashamed.

Hearing this answer Timothy asked confused “What? What do you mean by ‘she is gone’?”

“She was the first one who promised to come back, but a week later Her Highness disappeared from the palace where she lived, along with her her butler and her two maids. I already arranged staff to find her, but they still have yet to find her whereabouts.”

What could this mean? Such a waste, she only needed to believe in me! Timothy felt that his heart was full of pain, he had set high expectations for his sister; he had hoped that she could become his

adjutant. After all, while growing up, Tilly always performed exceptionally cleverly, and her performance was even more dazzling than his own. She only lost her place as Crown prince because she was a girl.

In the beginning, Timothy had an excellent impression of her when looking at the arrangements made by his father; it was very clear that the King didn't want Tilly to be involved in this storm. Because of this, he gave her Silver City, which was near King City and had an ordinary business environment with no possibility of training troops. But who could have ever guessed that she would run away? Was this a choice made by a wise man?

“Now that she is gone, the former Lord should take over Silver City once more. You should also let the search continue, I cannot permit another person with royal blood to wander among the common people.” He gritted his teeth, trying to suppress his raging emotions, “Well, until now, only my 3rd younger sister refused to obey?”

“Yes, Your Majesty,” answered Sir Bullet.

“Since she was so stubborn, we have to take some rough measures,” said Timothy while looking at Prime Minister Vic. To start a war, the Prime Minister and the King have to approve it. Since he was his biggest supporter, getting his approval wouldn't be a problem, “I'm going to let Duke Ryan guard the South Border and force Garcia to give up Port of Clearwater and escort her back to King City.”

Sure enough, Marquis Vic replied, “This should not be delayed,

please give the order for war, so that the Minister for Foreign Affairs can carry out the order.”

Timothy nodded with satisfaction. At the moment when he wanted to order the secretary to write the drafting order, hasty steps could be heard from outside the hall. Then, with a burst of noise, the doors were opened and a Knight wearing a blue-striped cloak strode into the hall.

Timothy immediately recognized him, he was the famous “Cold Wind Knight” Naim Moor. He walked straight up to the center of the hall, went on one knee and said, “Your Majesty, I have just received news from the south,” he gasped loudly and his voice was clearly anxious, “Your sister Garcia Wimbledon, in just five days, defeated Duke Ryan’s troops and had occupied Eagle City! ... She also declared herself as the Queen of Clearwater, and all the Lords in the South have responded and declared their territory as independent!”

Chapter 73 - Artillery Test

In the west of Border Town, near the Chishui river.

The snow didn't permit the cart to move a single step further; the entire group of people had already spent half a day dragging the carriage to the artillery field.

"What is this?" asked Carter, who had already become somewhat accustomed to the fact that the Prince would repeatedly come up with new inventions, "Is this just a bigger gun?"

"You are almost right," Roland confirmed. He directed his men to remove the cover so that he could personally adjust the angle of the cannon. He Set its angle parallel to ground level, pointing towards a snow pile.

The principles of cannons and guns were identical, so calling it a larger version of a gun wasn't inappropriate. The cannon used for the test was able to shoot 12-pound heavy iron balls. Before they could ignite the lead, the chamber had to be loaded with gunpowder and the iron ball. As a reference for the cart, Roland took the old designs from the cannons seen in history books. But to improve their durability, Roland had told the carpenters to replace many parts that were usually built out of wood with their iron counterparts.

In order to manufacture the cart for the cannon, Roland almost spent as much time on it as for the cannon itself. Three skilled carpenters needed one whole week to finish it, the especially time-

consuming part was the wheels that had the diameter of half a human.

First, the carpenters had to produce four square bars of equal length. These bars were then baked by fire until they could be bent. Afterwards, knives were used to peel away the excess. Finally, an outer coating of iron was applied to the wheels. This process alone took more than four days.

So in Roland's eyes, this limited cannon made by hand took on a very special place. Now, when he dragged it out for a test, he had already made special arrangements.

Chief Knight Carter and the Militia Commander Iron Axe were both at his side, as always. Also, there was his personal guard along with twenty members of the militia who were acting as sappers and lookouts. As for the witches, he had Nightingale and Lightning by his side. Thanks to Nana, the prejudice towards witches had been significantly reduced. In the eyes of the Militia, the most important person here was Nana when excluding the Prince.

“According to the usual process, we have to clean the cannon's barrel first.”

Roland said, while he could picture the blueprints of the cannon, this particular operation plan was a blank sheet for him. Within his brain he went through various cannon shots he had seen in films, trying to figure out the right process, but only heaven alone would know how effective it would be.

Lightning, in high spirits, took a mop and began cleaning the cannon. While cleaning the muzzle – her contract was different to that of the other witches – as long as she was allowed to personally operate all of Roland's new inventions, she would always be willing to help him to the best of her abilities, even without any other payment or remuneration.

Since Roland had to save money, he quickly accepted her terms. However, if he had any secret projects, he would still be able to study it secretly. Within his mind there were still many ideas he hadn't realized and were only waiting to be implemented. For now, he would just have to throw her the occasional few pieces in order to distract her.

Sweeping around with the mop, Lightning was able to clean up some junk, but in accordance to the process, she had to clean it a second time. Taking another mop, she started the cleaning again until she'd finished.

"Has everyone seen it?" asked Roland towards the crowd of guards and militias. The artillery test was also a drill. If he was able to increase the production rate of guns, the militia was bound to turn into an infantry, exchanging the pike for the gun. But even then they would need to go through many training sessions before they were good enough to use both types of hot weapons.

When he saw that everyone nodded, he told Lightning to proceed.

The little girl first opened the bag and took out a pocket-sized paper cartridge filled with gunpowder then stuffed it into the end

of the muzzle with a ramrod. She then took an iron ball and used the ramrod once more to push it into the barrel. Afterwards, she took out a lead wire from the rear end of the cannon barrel and inserted it into the eyelet to pierce it into the paperback. Thus, the launch preparation was complete.

To prevent accidents, everyone had to step fifteen meters away from the cannon. Lightning, who was standing close to the lead, saw the first sparks of the lead, but within the blink of an eye, it had already drilled into the barrel.

Then there came a loud roar – air sprayed out of the muzzle with such speed, that it even threw up the snow lying on the ground.

The theoretical effective range of a twelve-pounder cannon was up to a kilometer.

Even without any rifling, the cannon ball would still fly in a straight line.

Everyone could hear the sound when the iron ball hit the armor that was placed 100 meters away. The Iron-ball's speed wasn't reduced much, every time it hit the ground, it would bounce back up again, blowing up even more snow.

After the smoke cleared, Roland, along with Carter, and Iron Axe, all went directly to inspect the target. When they arrived near the armor, they noticed that the front of the armor was already in contact with its back, and that there was a palm-sized hole within the center. Obviously, the ball's speed still hadn't been reduced to

zero, since it had still flown 100 meters further. Even after it had dropped to the ground, it had kept on rolling, showing the incredible amount of power it contained.

“What frightening penetrative capability!” sighed Carter. He could already picture what would happen when the enemy stood together in groups; getting hit by several cannonballs that brought terror to the whole battlefield

“Three deities above,” Iron Axe began to pray. According to him, Roland had to be the messenger of Mother Earth. Except for a messenger of God, who else could bring such a frightening power to the world? He’d already studied the gunpowder’s chemistry; it was made of common chemicals which only needed to be carefully prepared. The flame was the incarnation of Mother Earth’s anger, as well as her most powerful weapon – at least these were the thoughts of the people in the south. Whenever they saw the never-ending orange flame produced by volcanic eruptions, they couldn’t help but begin to pray.

The result of the test was similar to what Roland had expected of a classical 12-pound cannon. The cannon’s biggest moment to shine had been during the US Civil War and in the time of Napoleon.

Afterwards, he loaded the cannon with different amounts of gunpowder to test their power levels. Although he knew that it could cause damage to the cannon, it was still necessary to do the tests.

Even after shooting with three different amounts of gunpowder,

the cannon still didn't show any sign of deformation. Apparently, the quality of steel used to make the cannon was excellent. In the end, Roland decided that the amount of powder they would use would be the 1.2 times the amount used during the tests. Afterwards, he used the tests to select a gunner.

“Your Highness, this is indeed a very powerful weapon but it is much too heavy. If we were to hit a pothole, we wouldn't be able to move any further.” Carter, who was immediately able to see the problems with the new weapon, criticized, “And, after every shot, the barrel has to be cleaned with a wet mop, then it has to be reloaded. Carrying the gunpowder, the cannon balls, and the cannon itself, I'm afraid that you will need five to six people to operate one cannon alone it.”

“Indeed, but it's all worth it! As long as we will be able to use two to three cannons, Duke... No, I mean the demonic beasts, like the kind of giant tortoise, won't be able to break through the wall any longer.” Roland coughed, that was close. As for the disadvantages of a 12-pound cannon, he intended to resolve it by shipping. With the help of the steam engine, he would be able to convert a traditional boat into a steam-powered boat. Even if it was the most primitive of paddle boats, it would still have a complex and bulky mechanical system.

So instead of changing the boat, he purchased a two-masted sailing boat. With Wendy's help, he would even be able to ship the cannons behind the Duke's troops. With this he would be able to attack the enemies from both sides, and be being able to easily and efficiently annihilate the Duke's forces.

Chapter 74 - Shipbuilding Project

“What? Why aren’t we able to afford to buy it?” Roland asked while going through the analysis of his request to obtain a two masted ship, which had been put on the table within his office.

Barov cleared his throat and then he explained, “Your Highness, it’s impossible. A brig costs between 80 to 120 gold royals, but this would only be the manufacturing cost. We also have to take into account the wages of the crew. Taking all additional costs into consideration we would need to pay up to 200 gold royals. “

“Didn’t I say we don’t need sailors or a helmsman? We also don’t need a captain; we just need to buy a boat!” Roland exclaimed while knocking on the table to underline his point. With the help of Wendy, he wouldn’t need so many people to drive the boat. River sailing vessels mostly sailed in only one direction. So, to operate it, only the sails had to be set, which made helmsmen and sailors redundant. However, since we can control the wind, why should I be afraid that we can’t move forward?

“Your Highness, there aren’t any offers of that kind, at least not in Willow Town.” Barov carefully explained, “It seems that you don’t know enough about this industry. In general, the owner of the ship is also its captain. He might be a merchant or he may be part of the nobility. If they belong to the former group, they will travel between all of the major cities or towns that have a marina, to sell or buy goods. If they belong to the latter group, they would typically recruit a deputy captain who was looking for a boat. Employees won’t be paid on a monthly basis. Instead, their salary would be paid for one to three years all at once.”

“Most of the time, the boat and the crew are tied together. You intend to purchase a vessel from a captain, but without the crew he had already hired, so the salary he had already paid will be his loss. Even for a member of the aristocracy, 80 gold royals isn’t a small amount of money. After the trade with Willow Town at the beginning of the month, the town hall now has a balance of 315 gold royals, but if we spend half of it to buy a boat now, we won’t be able to pay the salaries of the militia.” The assistant minister explained without pause, but afterwards, he had to first take a big gulp of ale.

After thinking about what he had heard, Roland asked “You said most of the time ...”

“Yes,” Barov nodded, “There are two cases when boats will be sold without their crew. The first would be when the merchant is in an urgent need of money, and they have to sell all of their property. They will start by disbanding their crew, and then they will try to sell the ship as quickly as possible. In the second case, the owner wants to replace their old boat with a new one. Both cases would be a good opportunity, but I have to say that this kind of situations is very rare.”

“Wait,” Roland frowned, “you said to buy a new boat ... So in this case, where do these ships come from?”

“Port of Clearwater, Seabreeze District, Farsight Point. Only cities with a seaport that have a dock are able to produce new ships.”

Hearing this Roland kept silent for a moment and thought everything through. So this was the original meaning of, “within Willow Town, it’s impossible to find such a deal.” However, I also can’t afford to travel to any of the port cities; they’re too far away, and if I don’t hire a crew, how would I get the ship back to Border Town?

“Since this is the case, I will have to think about it.”

When the assistant minister saw that the Prince was lost in thought, he quickly left the room.

Within Roland’s plan for the future, ships played an irreplaceable part. If there wasn’t a quick and conventional way to transport the artillery, he wouldn’t be able to use them in battle. Generally, the Duke’s troops were built up from the stronghold’s troops, mercenaries, farmers and knights. So, inevitably their marching speed was slow when they had to move.

But, the artillery would be even slower. Just like Carter had said, as soon as they hit a pothole the artillery couldn’t be moved any further– during this time and age, there weren’t any asphalt roads, there wasn’t even a stone road. During this time, the people would walk more, producing many trails. During sunny days they would be lucky, but when it rained, the path became muddy.

In the end, like always, would he have to rely on himself?

Roland spread out a piece of paper, writing down the needed specifications.

Firstly, the ship has to be able to carry one or two cannons in addition to thirty people, but it wouldn't be powered mechanically, only with sails.

Secondly, since the ship would be used only in rivers, it would need to have a shallow and stable hull.

Thirdly, it had to be easy to operate so that the members of the Militia could handle it after a short training.

Considering all these points, the only possible answer was a flat-bottomed barge ...

The draft in front of Roland was very shallow; it was a ship with a very low center of gravity that could be seen on almost all of the river routes. In the past, he had seen many loaded with piles of sand or gravel, and their railing was almost level with the surface of the water. And as long as there was a tugboat, it would be able to pull a barge.

After determining type of the ship, the next key point was to determine which material should be used when building the ship.

Roland wrote down three different options: Wood, Iron, or concrete.

Boats made of wood belonged to the earliest of the nautical technology tree. From a raft to a masted battleship. From sailing

on either the river or the sea, wooden boats could be used everywhere. Unfortunately, Roland didn't know how to use a log to build a flat-bottomed ship, and neither did he have any skilled craftsmen. If he relied on what he knew and on his craftsmen, he would only be able to make a large raft which could fall apart at any moment.

Ships made out of iron were built similarly to houses, always taking two beams which were arranged in a crisscross pattern, constituting a keel. The keel formed would then be coated with sheets of iron. Since Anna could do the welding; the overall stiffness was guaranteed. However, this approach would deplete the already small iron reserves. So this could only be the last resort, as building steam engines and cannons was a much more appropriate choice.

Then building boats out of concrete would be the last option – since the city wall construction was already finished, there was now a surplus of raw materials. As long as Anna had the time to calcinate, they would have enough concrete for one or two ships. The construction process would also be much easier than that of iron-boats. As long as they were able to produce a wooden template which could be reinforced with iron bars, they could quickly fill it with concrete. Even in this rural area, they could easily create several fishing boats out of concrete. Compared to iron ships, they wouldn't rust. With this, the ship wouldn't even need much maintenance. Even though a [concrete ship](#) could be built at a low cost, it would still be strong and durable. Even if he had never learned how to make big ocean-crossing ships, a river sailing ship didn't need a high level of technological knowledge. So, building it shouldn't be a problem, right?

Picturing all the details in his mind, Roland picked up the quill and rapidly began to draw sketches of the barge.

An area with a shed near the Shinshui River was hidden by walls.

In order to facilitate the launching process, Roland located the shipbuilding area as close to the river as possible.

The shed offered shelter against wind and snow and contained two basins for burning charcoal to keep the temperature from falling too far and destroying the hardening effect.

The carpenters had already pieced together the wooden template of the hull – the bow was formed in a circular design in order to reduce forward resistance, the aft instead had a square design meant to increase the load area. The boat had a length to width ratio of 3:1 and was built with a width of 8m. Compared to the traditional ratio of 8:1, it was simply a fat boat. In the center, they had set up two masts. The masts were inserted into the deck and connected to the iron beams of the ship. At the deck, they had placed a reserve rudder. Everywhere, the hull was strengthened with crisscrossing iron bars.

Even though they didn't have any iron wire, it didn't matter since Anna had welded all the iron crosses firmly, to form an iron structure which was connected throughout the whole bridge.

When the template and the reinforcements were ready, Roland

ordered the workers to start filling it up.

The concrete was poured into a basin-like template. The middle was flat, but the surrounding walls were five meters higher, forming the cabin walls. At first glance, it just looked like a uniquely shaped bathtub.

All people who were involved in the construction, including Anna, had never thought that this strange material, which was used to build the walls, could actually also be used to build ships.

Chapter 75 - Holy Mountain (Part 1)

Cara could hear the shortened breathing of the other witches.

“Someone else has to take over,” said Cara loudly, “Leaves, you will carry me next.”

The walk through the Impassable Mountain range was especially taxing during the snowy winter season. Every day, the forty-two witches had to find a suitable place to the camp, where they also could re-empower their badge so that they could resist the freezing temperatures at night.

“Yes, respected Mentor,” the witch in front of Cara answered while squatting down. When Leaves stepped to Cara’s side, Cara summoned one of her magic snakes and had it wrap around Leaves’ arm. She then used it to pull herself up, so that she could stand. As the snake touched Leaves’ body, Cara noticed that Leaves started trembling slightly.

Damn Nightingale, Cara bitterly thought, if only she hadn’t repeatedly refused my offer of mercy, I wouldn’t have minded taking her back into the ranks of us sisters. But since we are almost coming close to the critical moment, I can’t afford to take any risks.

And what was the result of my kind offer? Without any hesitation, the damn traitor took the first chance to escape, she even tried to stab me to death ...

This is what happens when I'm too kind! Cara's brain boiled in rage, Nightingale's blow had directly pierced her spine. Although Leaves was able to quickly heal her wounds with herbs, Cara's lower body was still paralyzed and without any feeling.

Wait until I reach the Holy Mountain! There I will gain the power to gather more witches, and with their help, I will one day cut you into thousands of pieces!

While fueling her anger, Cara suddenly heard a voice "Respected Mentor, there are demonic beasts ahead of us."

The voice belonged to Scarlett, who was responsible for scouting. With her eyes, she was able to see through all obstacles and immediately discover any trap in front of her. She even had the ability to see fast moving objects clearly, which was demonstrated during one confrontation with the Church where she was able to knock away a crossbow arrow with her bare hands.

"Put me down immediately. Leaves, you will also go and assist them."

Leaves nodded as she crouched down and placed Cara on a stone. Cara's sore hand directly fell into the snow, from where a cold feeling spread through to her whole body, making her unhappily think, you can't even remove the snow before you putting me down?

But she didn't say it out loud. After all, Leaves was an irreplaceable member of her sisterhood. Previously Wendy with

her kind temper had been responsible for recruiting new members for the Witch Cooperation Association, while instead Leaves had been responsible for maintaining the morale and courage to ensure that the witches would follow Cara's orders. Without her ability, I'm afraid that we would have already lost more than half of our members to the witch hunts.

When thinking of Wendy, Cara's heart began to hurt. She had never expected that Wendy, together with whom she had created the Witch Cooperation Association to help as many witches as possible, would betray everyone for the sake of Nightingale.

Even after Wendy had blown her away, she didn't want to kill Wendy. The venom released by her magic snake "Suffering" was only acting slowly, but it would cause unbearable pain immediately. After letting Wendy suffer for a short time, Cara had planned to let her snake "Nothingness" bite her and remove the toxin. She had just wanted to teach Wendy a lesson. But no matter what, without the help of her magic snake, the venom was incurable. So Nightingale made the wrong decision by taking Wendy away. Without the bite of "Nothingness", Wendy wouldn't be able to live one more day.

Did that mean that the former nun was destined never to reach their final destination with her sisters?

Cara didn't care about the other runaway, Lightning. She had only recently entered the Witch Cooperation Association and only seemed to have the ability to fly. She had always supported another view on how they should look for the Holy Mountain, even sometimes questioning the Holy Book. Whenever that girl

acted against the will of the Witch Cooperation Association, Cara wanted to throw that talkative little girl into the snow and strangle her.

At the moment when the two wolf-like demonic beasts emerged from behind a corner on the mountain path, the witches were already prepared and awaiting the attacks from the demonic beasts. All the sisters without fighting abilities were placed near the end to keep them safe. Leaves was the first to release her magic, aiming at the weeds close to the feet of the demonic beasts. Soon green tendrils broke through the snow and wrapped themselves around that of the enemies' feet. Another witch, with the power to control the air, began to drain the air around the demonic beasts. Thanks to this, the two monsters soon fell into a state of asphyxiation. And were soon foaming at their snouts and began convulsing before finally falling to the ground.

This was the power of witches that Cara had been looking for. Within a group of mortals armed with swords these wolves would have wreaked havoc, but in front of us witches they perished within seconds. Clearly, only we, witches with the power of magic are loved by God. If only there wasn't such a thing as the God's Stone of Retaliation – bah, to the hell with the stone, she spat towards the ground, if that stone didn't exist, how would the Church be able to suppress us?

“Respected Mentor, let's continue forward,” said Leaves when she came back to Cara.

“Have someone else carry me.” Cara sighed, “You are too tired from the fight.”

After the battle, they continued further along the path. At noon, the women responsible for finding the next camping ground discovered a place with less snow, thanks to its leeward arrangement. After reaching the place, they decided to take a break and eat in order to recharge their stamina.

One witch with the ability to work with stone began to work her magic. When the soil and gravel began to move and shoved the snow away, it seemed that the ground came alive. Soon the ground was flat and dry. One after another the witches began to carry out their duty, like making a fire and setting their pot on it to cook some porridge. They started to heating some snow until boiling and then added herbs which were strengthened by Leaves together into the water, which immediately started exuding a sharp fragrance.

“Everyone please give your badge to me,” cried a little girl with rare red hair like a raging fire. It really matched her ability, since her power also had to do with fire. It’s allowed her to heat any objects she was in contact with. The badges which had provided so much relief for the Witch Cooperation Association had been singlehandedly created by her.

Even though at first glance her ability seemed insignificant, the truth was, that she was of great help to the Witch Association Cooperation. Especially during their march through the Impassable Mountain range, where they couldn’t find anything to warm themselves with. In the cold snow, it was very easy to lose heat from their bodies until eventually falling unconscious.

After everyone had eaten wheat porridge, the witches packed their bags and started moving along. According to Cara's conjecture, the so-called Gates of Hell, was in fact, the gateway to the Holy Mountain. The Church deliberately changed its name to Hell to prevent the witches from finding the Holy Mountain. According to the Ancient Books, they needed to cross a total of three stone gates, the last line before the barbaric lands. Usually, they were hidden deep in the ground, only during the blood moon, would the stone gates come to the surface.

After they had set out from the camp, the witches had to walk for about half of a month through the Impassable Mountain range, but soon they would leave the mountain range, setting foot into the middle of nowhere. During these last days, the demonic beasts appeared more and more frequently.

“Quick, quick, quick, look ... what is this?!” Suddenly someone shouted in horror.

Cara looked in surprise in that direction, becoming immediately stunned out of horror.

There was a city flying in the sky!

The sky was still gray, and the snow was still falling out of the very low clouds. But within the clouds, there was a city, partly hidden and partly visible.

Those buildings were built in a pattern I have never seen before, they look like spires standing side by side. If the black dots are

windows within the spires with an average size, the spire would reach a height of hundreds of meters! This isn't something a human could build! Even the proudest building of the Church, the Cathedral at the Hermes, which they call the Tower which reached the Sky, was only 50 meters high!

Since this had to have been built by non-humans, then there was only one answer: This city has been constructed by the hand of God!

Cara had difficulty in restraining her excitement, throughout the whole time the voice within her heart shouted – I found the Holy Mountain!

Chapter 76 - Holy Mountain (Part 2)

“Sisters, it’s the Holy Mountain! We’ve found it!”

Cara screamed and showed the whole world her happiness. Many witches foolishly stood in their places, shaken by the spectacle before them. But, there were also others who jumped around and began crying out in sheer joy.

Scarlett, however, frowned after looking at the city and muttered, “Is this really the Holy Mountain?”

Leaves, hearing this, leaned toward Scarlett and whispered, “Why do you think this? Is something wrong?” Deep down she had the same question. After all, this city in the sky didn’t look the same as described in the Holy Book, where it was said to be golden, splendorous and majestic. This city with its spires also looked spectacular, but it was entirely built in grayish black, and looked bleak even during the daytime. In addition, there was also a red fog above the city, which strongly resembled a blood mist.

“There was something ... it squeezed itself into one of those holes,” Scarlett spoke again with a dry voice, “I couldn’t see it clearly, but it definitely didn’t resemble the gods...”

Leaves could feel all of her hairs begin to stand up. Within the Witch Cooperation Association, it was Scarlett who had the best eyes and could see clearly at this distance. So hearing her say this gave Leaves quite an uneasy feeling. Unfortunately, Lightning had also left with Nightingale. If not, she could have flown near the

city and taken a look.

“Sisters! The Holy Mountain is waiting for us to take it,” Cara raised her hands into the air and shouted euphorically, “With just a little bit more effort, we will soon find the Eternity!”

Then, she immediately urged Stone to carry her further. Leaves personally didn’t want to move forward, but in the end, she still took the first step. She thought, two weeks ago, everyone found out what would happen if someone disagreed with Cara. I’m afraid at this point, there is nothing which will be able to stop her from moving forward!

Their marching speed increased by a steady pace. After leaving the foot of the mountain, the snow had unexpectedly reduced and the surrounding temperature had also picked up. This is the legendary forbidden lands, the land on which no human had ever set foot before. However, now Leaves could see footprints stamped on this desolate land. If Lightning was here and saw this, she would be very happy, right?

When she looked back and saw the mountains towering behind her, she couldn’t believe they were able to cross this barrier. Leaves guessed that it was only because of the impassable Mountain range that the demonic beasts couldn’t flood into the hinterlands. Are they only able to attack from the north because that’s where they can pass the mountains?

No matter what, if we really find the Holy Mountain and don’t need to drift any longer from one place to another, then I will also be satisfied ... thought Leaves as she sighed softly. To tell the truth,

when Nightingale came back to the camp and told everyone about her life and future in Border Town, Leaves was enchanted. When Nightingale asked Wendy and everyone else if they wanted to leave together with her, she couldn't help but want to step out and shout her name. But in the end, she wasn't able to cross the threshold within her heart and was unable to leave the shadow of the past behind.

Leaves shook her head, don't allow yourself think about the past, instead, focus on keeping pace with the others, don't fall behind in this desolate land.

Soon they discovered something strange-regardless of their speed, the city seemed to retreat as fast as they moved forward.

After an hour of marching, "The Holy Mountain" was still suspended in the clouds, neither growing nor shrinking, it seemed just like ... they hadn't gotten closer at all..

"Respected Mentor, please order a rest, our sisters are getting tired," said Stone. During this period of marching, the people who had to carry Cara had changed several times, but she was clearly the one who had to bear her weight the longest.

"No! How could we stop now!" Cara thoughtlessly rejected Stone's suggestions, "This is a test by our gods, sisters, if we don't show them our strong will, we will never be able to arrive at the Holy Mountain! We can never stop! We must continue up to the very doorsteps in order to enter the Holy Mountain directly in front of us!"

Seeing that her persuasion had failed, she couldn't do anything else other than move forward.

Under no circumstances were they allowed to stop, even during two waves of demonic beasts they had to go forward. During the second wave, they even encountered two hybrid beasts, on which Leaves' shackles didn't work and without them she was unable to stop the monsters' assault. A sister who was caught off guard had to pay the price for the group's overconfidence. She got her neck cut by claws and her blood was spilled over the ground.

When they finally were able to kill all the demonic beasts, they discovered in horror that the sky had gradually darkened. Apparently nightfall would arrive soon. The city in front of them was still visible, but its outline had become more and more blurred over time, seeming as if it gradually disappeared.

According to their past experiences, they had to find a suitable campground and build their camp, but in these desolate lands, the surroundings were completely different compared to the mountains. When looking around, all they could see were flat plains infested with demonic beasts. There wasn't a single place of safety where they could rest overnight.

“Respected Mentor, we have to withdraw to the foot of the Mountains! Let Scarlett lead us with her red eyes, with her help we might be able to reach the mountains by midnight,” pleaded a witch.

“No!” Cara shouted, “We have spent the whole afternoon walking with nearly no pause just to reach this place. Now when we have already consumed more than half of our stamina, we can no longer maintain the same speed and return. Sisters, we only can press on further! We can truly find the Holy Mountain, and there we can settle down to rest. “

“Then what should we do with Sherry?” asked a witch as she pointed to the ground where Sherry, showing no signs of vitality, laid.

“We have no time to bury her,” Cara shook her head, “Keep her here, the earth will accommodate her.”

Leaves sadly closed her eyes, again another of my sisters is gone, if I were only a little more powerful, she wouldn't have to die in this desolate land, without a tombstone to tell of her life.

During that time when many sisters couldn't decide whether they should move forward or retreat, Stone suddenly exclaimed, “Look at the sky, the city is gone!”

Hearing this, Leaves immediately opened her eyes looked up to see the night sky hidden behind a wall of gray-black clouds. The city had disappeared, just as if it had never existed.

Everyone was rooted in their places, and a terrible silence began to befall them.

During the whole time the sun had been up, the city had never vanished ...

Leaves suddenly felt a horrible feeling as though her brain were struck by lightning; she remembered the tales told of adventurers, about those fantastic sceneries seen on the sea. Her whole body began to shudder, and she could only whisper, “We have been cheated...” Soon, she shouted, “We have been cheated, that wasn’t the Holy Mountain! What we saw was only a mirage!”

“Mirage?” Cara abruptly turned around, looking somewhat grim and asked with a terror-stricken voice, “What is that?”

“It is something which Lightning often mentioned within her stories. A phenomenon which was often encountered during a sea voyage, but also seen on land, only much rarer. We have seen nothing but an illusion; the real city may be very far away from us, it is even possible that it isn’t in front of us at all! “

“Does this mean that it at least exists and didn’t just disappear?” Cara asked with little hope.

“This ...” Leaves took herself some time to answer, “I do not know.”

At this moment, Scarlett suddenly shouted, “Be careful! Something is coming!” with a horrified look on her face, she stared towards the left side of their group.

“Is it a demonic beast?” asked Windseeker as she entered her battle stand, “How many?”

“No ...” Scarlett answered and took two steps back in fear, “I don’t know what that is ...”

After her voice died down, a shadow suddenly appeared from afar, and directly struck Scarlett with lightning speed. Although Scarlett had been able to clearly see it in the darkness, she was still unable to dodge it– it was just too fast.

Almost within the blink of an eye, it had struck Scarlett on her chest and pierced directly through her, even nailing down some other witches behind her. When it finally stopped, several witches had been impaled, and everyone finally saw what it was.

It was actually a spear.

Chapter 77 - Holy Mountain (Part 3)

Leave's blood froze upon seeing this horrible scene.

To their left, two shadows slowly emerged out of the dark. They were big and had a strange appearance that was nothing like the looks of common demonic beasts. Leaves thought that their appearances were similar to humanoid creatures riding on the back of hybrid wolves. Their bodies were twice as large as ordinary humans, and instead of armor they wore clothes that were made from an unknown material – no, “clothes” wasn't the right word, it was more similar to bloated animal skin in which they wrapped themselves tightly, thus giving them a bulging look.

However, the most eye-catching feature of the two beings were the heads they wore as helmets, they were clearly skulls of demonic beasts, giving them a malevolent and atrocious impression. Their eyes were gouged out of their heads. Instead of eyes, lumps of reddish-brown crystals were sewn in. A patch of skin was attached to the head, extending to the back of the demonic beast's shell. One of the people still had spears attached to its mount's saddle while the other one wore an unusual kind of gauntlet – from Leaves' point of view, it looked like they only had three fingers.

Suddenly, one word flashed through Leaves' mind: “Devil!”

“Attack the enemy!” Cara was the first one to attack, and her piercing shout dragged their attention back away from stupidly looking at the enemy. Stone squatted down and placed one hand on the ground, turning the area underneath the snow into a

swamp. This could be regarded as a brilliant response: Normally when they reacted fast, the two demonic beasts mounts could jump and fly the short distance over the swamp with their wings. But apparently not these two, their wings had been cut off, and now a harness was tied to their bare bones to which the devils held on to. Since they could not fly any longer, they would have to go around the swamp, which gave the other witches time to react.

But the enemy didn't play by the same rules, they just drove their mounts into the swamp. Using the beasts' momentum, they jumped up from the monsters' back, crossing over the distance of the swamp and landing behind Stone, which was exactly the place where the non-combat sisters were stationed.

"Spread out quickly!" Leaves loudly shouted at the same moment the devil with the three-finger gauntlet started its killing spree. Its agility was completely unexpected for its body length, the witch standing near its landing place hadn't even the time to react before her head was already shattered by its punch. Until they were finally able to respond, two more sisters got their necks immediately broken, but eventually they fled in panic. Only Shino was still standing at her former place. Although she didn't have any combat ability, she didn't choose to escape like all the others. Instead, she took the crossbow from her back, aimed, and shot at the enemy. But, the devil reacted just too fast, it took a sidestep and then kicked Shino in the chest. The kick was so powerful, that the little girl flew away like a broken doll, her body flipping over several times before crashing into the ground. Blood gushed endlessly from her mouth as she finally laid still.

The spear-carrying devil instead turned and walked towards the utterly terrified Stone. He raised the spear and aimed at her, but

exactly at the moment when it wanted to release the spear, a flame exploded in front of it. Red Pepper had aimed at the enemies crotch, and after she had released her attack, she took Stone's hand and ran away together with her. When the devil tried to catch up with them, it was stopped by a wall of black grass.

Leaves released all of her magic into the ground, letting all the seeds within the earth grow, turning them into vines, which slowly crawled in the direction of Ironhand (Devil). At the same time, Cara shouted out "Pain" and released two snakes which each bit into one of the devil's arms. Just when the devil finally shook off Cara's snakes, it suddenly felt a tugging feeling at his feet. When it looked down, it saw vines crawling up his feet, and suddenly it was pulled back and fell towards the ground.

"Run, run, sisters, Run!" Shouted Leaves with a trembling and fearful voice, "Quickly, everyone escape! Hurry away from these horrible monsters! They are the source of evil described in the ancient book! They must have directly come through the gates of Hell!

The torment of the snake's venom seems to be ineffective against the Devils. When the fallen down Ironhand saw that his companion with the spear was in trouble, he frantically tried to free himself from the vines, which held his body down. The devil with the spear went into a throwing posture, which let its arm rapidly swell up. This caused the already thin supporting skin to get even thinner so that the devil's dark red blood vessels and bones became clearly visible.

"Leaves, look out!" shouted Stone as she used her quagmire

magic again, this time directly aiming it at the devil's feet. The devil was already in its throwing motion and when its foot sank into the ground it had no time to react. Through this unexpected attack, the devil lost its balance and spear that was already leaving its hand changed its angle at the last moment, impaling itself completely into the ground right before Leaves feet. Seeing all this, Leaves broke out in sweat.

The swollen arm shrank rapidly after the spear was thrown, looking just like a dried tree trunk soon after.

Seeing that the devil couldn't throw spears repeatedly, Leaves realized that now was the best time to flee. Other witches also noticed this, for example, Stone and Red Pepper. Seeing that Ironhand was still struggling with the vines on the ground, they ran towards the unattended Cara, wanting to bring the mentor with them when they ran. Leaves, who looked into the direction of Ironhand, discovered that it didn't try to free itself any longer but instead turned towards the three witches with both of its hands extended towards them.

What is he doing? Stop!

"No -" Leaves didn't even have the chance to warn the others before glaring blue light burst out of the Devil's hands like a lightning bolt it pierced through the air, twisting and hitting her three sisters. Blue rays jumped between the three, issuing a crackling sound of thunder. White smoke began to rise from their twitching bodies which had caught on fire.

The attack seemed to have consumed much of the enemy's

energy, because it started to breathe heavily and couldn't move. At this point, Leaves' magic also reached its limit, and her vines began to wither, turning into dead weeds.

Leaves was only able to think, now, everything is over. Cara's desperate cries seemed to slowly get farther and farther away as her own body strength faded away, until she fell to the ground.

After only a moment of rest, Ironhand had already stood up from the snow and began to walk to a panic-stricken Cara, this time there was truly no one who could stop it. When he arrived at her side, Ironhand grasped Cara's throat and began to strangle her. Cara desperately fought back and tried to break away from the Devil's finger, but in front of its monstrous power her efforts were futile. During her desperate struggle, Cara sent her snakes out again, letting them attack the enemy's arm and neck. However, the Devil seemed unmoved, and continuing to tighten its hand around her neck.

At this moment the unexpected happened. Under the fierce attack of the magic snakes, the devil's skin was finally ripped open. Immediately, red fog began to leak out of the fracture, soon enveloping the Devil and Cara. The former released a terrible scream, and under the red fog its skin began quickly to fester, exposing its tendons and bones. Ironhand had to let go of Cara and instead tried to block the wound, trying to hold back the dissipating fog. But it was in vain, its body began to tremble uncontrollably, and soon fell down to never move again.

When seeing this, the other devil whose body was already half buried within the swamp, released a heartbreaking scream, it was

a sound Leaves had never heard before, like a sharp scream and a dull roar mixed together, piercing her ear and giving birth to endless pain.

But the enemy's scream didn't let Leaves fall into panic and flee. Instead, she only had their victory in her eyes.

She bit her lips and tried to pull out the last drops of her strength in order to stand up. When she finally stood, she grabbed Shino's crossbow, reloaded it and aimed at the last Devil. The devil clearly understood what Leaves was trying to do and began to work his arms frantically, but within a swamp, the more someone struggled, the faster they sank. The devil He tried to block its vulnerable parts, but yet in the end, it was in vain.

For my lost sisters, with that thought, Leaves pulled the trigger and sent the arrow flying.

The crossbow arrow accurately pierced the neck, releasing once more the red fog from the wound. After the mist dispersed, its head finally dropped down.

She had killed the Devil.

After letting the crossbow fall, Leaves turned around only to see the bodies of more than ten sisters who had lost their lives. Immediately hit by sorrow, Leaves dropped to her knees as her tears burst free.

Chapter 78 - Accompany

Wendy opened her eyes and discovered an unknown ceiling above her. The ceiling was made of gray brick, and had cobwebs hanging from wooden beams along with an unlit chandelier. Slowly, the scene turned from fuzzy to clear until she could see every detail.

It isn't a cold stone roof or a narrow tent, she thought, right, half a month ago we were forced to leave the Witch Cooperation Association. Who knows, perhaps under Cara's leadership they have already found the Holy Mountain?

She took a deep breath. Though it wasn't as clean and fresh as the air within a cave, the warm air and the cozy atmosphere made her very comfortable. Her body was wrapped in a soft and velvety silk and laid on a mattress out of several layers of soft cotton blankets, so when she laid down, she slightly sank into it. Even if she stretched her whole body, her toes wouldn't be exposed.

She felt a little guilty that she wanted to do nothing other than stay in bed. Even so, she had stayed here for only half a month but here her heart was at peace, something she hadn't felt in a long time.

Within the castle, no matter how late it was, no one would ever disturb her. For example, right now. Wendy turned her head and gazed out of the window, seeing that the sky was still gray, even somewhat dazzling. It was probably 10 a.m. Within her last years of wandering, she had never been able to sleep so peacefully. She would be woken by any small noise. She even had to prepare the

food for rest of the day before daybreak out of fear. The whole time they had to live in fear that the church might discover their current whereabouts. Also, no one could guarantee that they would outlive their next Demon's Bite.

Even during their time walking through the Impassable Mountain Range, she was always busy with doing chores. She would help with drying foods or herbs, with drying her cooperation sisters' laundry, or cleaning the camp and so on ...

Even so, Wendy didn't mind doing it. Every time when she saw her sisters smiles, she felt very happy. But now, living such a lazy life, she discovered that she herself couldn't resist enjoying such a life.

No, I can't be this lazy any longer. She patted her cheeks to motivate herself to crawl out of bed. After all, when she had lived in the church's convent, the nuns would often warn that lazy people wouldn't receive the blessing and protection of God.

In a little while, I will go to the garden and practice my wind control. By the way, every time she remembered that the Prince required her to train her magic, she couldn't keep herself from laughing. Such strange and eccentric requirements – for example, after he saw her ability, he had told her that he hoped she would be able to blow the wind over a distance of more than ten meters. However, there had never existed a magic power that was effective at such a distance. When she told him that she wasn't be able to do it, he didn't get angry. Rather, he came up with a strange idea: she should stand on top of a stool, and use her power to rise up and down. When Wendy tried it, she discovered that it was actually

feasible. Seeing the test results, His Royal Highness was very satisfied, so besides asking her to train more, he also asked her if she was afraid of heights.

It was exactly like Nightingale had said, Roland Wimbledon is an elusive person, but he is also a prince who deeply cared for us witches. Thinking up to this point, Wendy gently sighed. There really is a Prince who doesn't hate witches! Respected Mentor, you were wrong!

When she put on her clothes, she felt that they were a little small around her chest area – even so, Wendy had already become accustomed to this kind of strange clothing, she just wanted to find a needle to change its size, but before she could, someone knocked on her door.

“Come in.” said Wendy.

It turned out that it was Nightingale who opened the door and came in, leaving Wendy a little startled, but Wendy smiled and said, “Is His Highness still in bed? If not, you shouldn't have the free time to visit me.”

“What are you talking about? Ah, I'm not by his side all day long.” Nightingale said, embarrassed, as she raised her basket, “I brought you breakfast.”

Usually, the maids were the ones responsible for delivering breakfast. In addition, after bedtime, Nightingale would often accompany the Prince to chat, so it was quite hard to see her at all.

Wendy smiled from the bottom of her heart, I just woke up, but she was already here to deliver food, she certainly had slipped in several times.

“Now tell, what’s the matter?” asked Wendy while she took a cheese sandwich from inside the basket and put it into her mouth.

“Well ...” Nightingale came over and set herself on the bed, “Today Nana will go through... that day.”

Wendy was speechless, since it was Nana’s first time going through the Demon’s Bite, it wouldn’t be as violent and long as on the day of her adulthood, but still, it couldn’t be guaranteed that she would be safe. The younger they were, the less pain they would be able to endure. Wendy placed the basket on the nightstand and went to Nightingale’s side, patting her shoulder to comfort her and told her, “Didn’t His Highness say that as long as we release our magic every day, we will be able to minimize our suffering?”

“But that is just a speculation.” Nightingale contradicted.

“At least it sounds very reasonable,” answered Wendy, “Didn’t Anna safely pass through it? Even so, it was the most difficult of Demon’s Bite, it was the day of her adulthood, yet she suffered no harm. This was exactly what you’ve seen with your own eyes.” she paused for a moment, then asked, “Where is Nana?”

“At the moment she is in the Medical Center,” When it came to this, Nightingales mouth nearly sprang open, “I heard that her father, Sir Pyne had bought a huge amount of hares from hunters,

which have been sent to the Medical Center so she can keep practicing until tomorrow.”

“She has such a nice father,” Wendy exclaimed a little enviously, “I can’t remember the time when I was a kid ... that is a very strange thing, it’s just as if my memories are a blank sheet. There is no father, no mother, the first thing I can remember, is my staying within the convent.”

“It seems that I’m a little more fortunate than you.” Nightingale teasingly exclaimed.

“Well, you were really lucky.” Wendy sat herself beside Nightingale and took her into her arms, asking her, “Are you nervous?”

“ ... ”

For a moment, Nightingale kept silent, but then she gently nodded.

Wendy certainly knew why the other was so tense. Today wasn’t only a crucial day for Nana, no, it was also the day in which could become the turning point in all of the witch’s history. If Nana was able to survive this bite, it would mean that witches could thoroughly get rid of the shadow of being the devil’s servants, turning Border Town into the long sought for “Holy Mountain” – maybe one day, all witches will gather here. They will be able to live a normal life no difference with ordinary people, no longer having a need to wander around and try to avoid the Church’s

witch hunt.

“There is no use in worrying about it, we just to have to laze around the whole day and accompany Nana.”

“Laze ... around?” Nightingale stared at Wendy in disbelief.

“Yes well, who told you to tell me the news so early? It makes me nervous too,” Wendy simply said, “Since I’m no longer in the mood to practice, we could also use this time to visit Nana. Wasn’t something like this written in the contract? It is called paid leave.”

After eating dinner, Nana’s room was full of people – Anna, Lightning, Nightingale, Wendy, naturally also Nana’s father, and Roland. Having to face the battle soon, Nana’s face was full of insecurity, “Well ... will I have to die?”

“Of course not!” They all shook their heads.

“It’s your first time, so the demon bite won’t be as strong,” Wendy took her hand and spoke encouragingly, “Just put all of your spirit on the thought of holding on.”

“It hurts, you’re breaking my fingers!” Sir Pyne held his daughter’s hand, “You have become very strong during your time within the Medical Center, I, your father, am very proud of you.” The little girl nodded, letting her gaze wander over the crowd before finally focusing on Anna, who stepped forward and kissed

her on the forehead, “You will survive, right?”

“Yes.”

Chapter 79 - Answers

The curtains were shut and a fire was blazing in the fireplace, maintaining a comfortable temperature within the room.

There was a big difference between Anna and Nana's day of adulthood, this time the latter was awake. In order to ensure that she wouldn't become too frightened from the upcoming pain, they played some simple games to distract her, and so that she wouldn't fall asleep during the whole night.

Even Roland performed some magic coin tricks, stupefying the onlooking audience. Especially Nana, who for the whole time was staring with big eyes at Roland's hand. If it were ordinary times, she would have surely shouted that Roland should teach her.

The magic tricks of this age were still far from being a highlight, for now, it was more a small sideshow, like snakes dancing to the sound of a flute, breathing flames, crushing stone plates on one's chest and the like. Compared with later generations of skillful diversion and nimble fingers, everything now was only amateur level.

Finally, Lightning began to talk about her sailing experience, when she traveled with her father between the islands and fjords. Telling of big whirlpools and beautiful reefs, and of hunting giant deep-water sharks and octopus. Although everyone knew that part of it was fictitious she still had everyone's attention, even captivating Roland with her tales – in his imagination, those sailing ships turned into huge armored battleships, which crossed oceans and discovered a New World.

As a matter of fact, there was a part in the historical timeline of this world he didn't understand. The last written record of the past wasn't older than four hundred and fifty years. Even the former Prince's education within the palace did not mention the reason. But it could also be, that the former Prince just hadn't paid attention during the lectures, thought Roland. Within Border Town's library, there was nothing to find, so the only possibility was to win the war against Longsong Stronghold and look and ask there for more information.

When Lightning finally finished her stories about her adventures, Roland could no longer suppress a yawn, but when he looked at Nightingale, the latter only shook her head, indicating that there hadn't been any magical change until now. Not having an accurate timing tool is so inconvenient, how can I determine the time we still have to wait? Roland thought in frustration and poured himself a cup of warm water then sat down afterwards to wait.

But gradually, everyone got the feeling that there was something wrong, it just took too long – Nana had repeatedly yawned, apparently only barely able to stay awake. Even Nightingale became anxious, so she touched the little girl's forehead, while also closely gazing at the magic power within Nana's body, looking for any change.

When Roland wanted to take a gulp of water, he discovered that the water was already emptied. So on the way to the kettle on the fireplace, he couldn't help himself from looking through the curtains when he passed the window, only to discover, that it was still snowing. But when he had opened the heavy curtains a

fraction, a touch of light fell into the room.

He was pleasantly surprised to discover, that the dark sky had already gained a glimmer of milky white.

“Everyone look!” Roland shouted and pulled open the entire curtain. Alarming everyone with his cry, they all rushed to the windows to see what happened. When they discovered the faint light in the sky, they realized that the new day had already arrived without them noticing.

So with this, in addition to Anna, Nana also went through the Demon’s Bite without any pain.

When Roland later returned to his room he discovered that there were already two people who were waiting for him.

Nightingale and Wendy.

Within their faces, he couldn’t discover any sense of sleepiness, there was only excitement.

“Were you able to confirm that Nana’s ‘date’ was today – no, last night?” asked Roland immediately.

“Yes, but at that time the change within her was only very subtle, I would have never thought that it was the bite’s critical moment,”

answered Nightingale with certainty, “Your Highness, your assumption was correct! As long as we witches continue to release our magic, it will continue to grow, and the suffering of our body will be reduced. If we can maintain a certain amount of training every day, all the witches would have a great chance at surviving their day of adulthood!”

“Within the whole Kingdom of Graycastle, only in your territory can we witches display our abilities, in a sense, Border Town is our Holy Mountain,” continued Wendy, “I want to beg you to make sure that as many witches as possible know of this news, so that our sisters can speedily arrive in this sanctuary. I think every one of them will be willing to help you. “

“From the beginning, those were my intentions,” Roland nodded. “By the end of the Months of the Demons, the normal people and the witches will also have gained a certain degree of understanding of each other and been in contact. By then, I will arrange for people to spread the message – but, only as rumors. You must understand, that I can’t start a big advertising project to recruit witches, if so I would cause an uproar within the country, “after slightly pausing for a moment he continued, “this will only be possible if the Church is eradicated, or I gain the throne.”

“So it seems my best option is to help you ascend the throne,” declared Wendy and then without any hesitation she fell on one knee, reciting the oath of allegiance. Roland could clearly see, that her movements weren’t skilled, it just seems to be a spur of the moment. But he did not care about these details, he treated her exactly as Nightingale when he had accepted her oath of allegiance.

After she finished her plea, Wendy turned towards Nightingale and asked, “How was my performance?”

The latter curled her lip and said, “Barely passed.”

Roland helplessly shook his head, “So you two should get to bed early, during the whole night you weren’t able to close your eyes.”

“Your Highness, I have a request,” interrupting him, Wendy, who had just got up from the ground now she knelt down once again.

“Speak freely,” Roland put away his smile and seriously talked to her. The others act had made it clear that she had an important matter to discuss.

Unexpected Wendy told him “I want to, once more, go back to the Witch Cooperation Association’s camp.”

“Wendy!” shouted Nightingale and stared at her with big eyes, but she could see that within the latter’s eyes how steady and resolved she was.

“I do not know whether or not they were able to find the Holy Mountain, maybe they were, or maybe not. I hope you will allow me to go into the Impassable Mountain range after the Months of the Demons has ended. If Cara was unable to find the Holy Mountain, they may have gone back to the camp within the mountain range.”

“This will be highly dangerous,” Roland frowned, “Your leader attacked you regardless of your long friendship.”

“If she really had wanted to kill me, I would already be dead,” said Wendy. “She had summoned her magic snake ‘Pain’ instead of ‘Death’.” I don’t know how many will come back with me, or even if only one will come back with me, but at least I can deliver this important message to my sisters. As long as they release their magic every day, they won’t need to suffer the terrible pain.” Speaking up to this point, her voice became very gentle, “Your Highness, as long as you continue to treat us witches with so much kindness, my life will be yours, so naturally I won’t throw it away so easily. I will protect myself. So please allow me this request.”

Roland fell silent and thought, when thinking about safety, I ought to refuse her request. But there is also a different meaning to this request – if I give her the chance to save more witches, she will happily follow my orders and take any risk. But if I refuse her, she might still be willing to follow the orders, but I may lose the possibility to gain more witches, and she will forever carry a scar on her heart.

“I’ll allow it,” Roland finally nodded, “but you will still have to wait for two months until the end of the Month of the Demons. You also won’t travel alone, Lightning will go with you. I will also give you firearms for self-protection, as well ... a God’s Stone of Retaliation. Lightning can give you long distance support, and when you wear the God’s Stone of Retaliation during your meeting with Cara, her or any other ability won’t be able to hurt you.”

“Your Highness, please also let me go with her!” Nightingale pleaded.

“No, Veronica. His Highness’s safety is much more important than mine, he is the hope of all of us witches,” Wendy disagreed as she shook her head and laughed, “Take good care of him.”

Chapter 80 - Artillery

A week after the concrete ship was placed in the curing room, it was finally the day to launch the vessel.

All the workers were stunned when the Prince ordered to put the oversized bathtub into the water, making everyone wonder whether they misheard him.

However, they hadn't had misunderstood him.

His subordinates had to dismantle the temporary shed, and then they had to dig a slope at the bottom of the concrete ship, leading into the river. This part had to be handled with great care because of the weak tensile strength of cement products, even a small knock on the ground was enough to create small cracks that could destroy the whole vessel.

The ship was placed on top of logs, and the speed at which it slid was controlled with ropes. When everything was prepared, the workers let the wrist-thick rope slowly slide through their hands, careful so that the vessel would always be pointed in a straight line. While the workers shouted their slogan in sync, the ship slowly slid over the logs, creating a harsh sound of friction.

Fortunately, everything went well, and Roland could see how the ship got slowly lowered into the water. The ship sank nearly half a meter into the water, with more than one meter still above the surface. The workers were totally surprised to see that this massive construction made out of stone and metal didn't directly sink into

the riverbed with a loud bang, but instead peacefully floated above the surface.

“Hurry, take the ropes and put them around the bollards and then tie them tight!” commanded Roland loudly. If the vessel wasn’t tied quickly to the bollards, the water current would carry the ship along with it southwards.

Although Nightingale didn’t show herself to the public, but after seeing this shocking scene, she couldn’t help herself and ask with a voice full of wonder: “Why does the ship float?”

“Well ... it’s quite simple. The ship’s average density is lower than that of water, and as long as this is the case anything can float on water,” explained Roland and after a moment of thinking, he added, “That the ship is built out of iron and concrete doesn’t matter. In fact, you should have already seen a huge sailing boat, those also weigh much more than several stones.”

Since he didn’t hear the voice of Nightingale again, Roland assumed that the other was still comprehending what he had said. Even Anna wasn’t able to immediately understand the concept he had explained. Discovering this, Roland smiled and continued to direct the workers next task.

The subsequent hardening of the concrete took a lot of time, and every time it began to snow heavily, the work had to be stopped. Only when it didn’t snow for more than one hour, were they able to continue their work. The most time consuming task was the construction of the deck, which was built out of many wooden planks, and supported by many small stakes which were placed

between the bottom and the deck. Although this was a waste of space, but taking into account the primary purpose of the concrete ship, this didn't matter so much.

Afterward followed the rot-proofing. The carpenters knew very well how to do it. First they brushed a layer of oil with a pungent taste onto the deck. When the oil had dried, they repeated this procedure several times until it was finally coated with a red paint. Once the deck construction was completed, the installation phase of the upper building was started.

The so-called upper part consisted of a wooden shed which was placed between the two masts, and which later would be used to store guns and ammunition. When it began to rain, the shed could also be utilized by the crew as shelter. The roof of the wooden shed was extra thick so constructed that a person could stand on it, a special place only created for Wendy. As long as she stood on the roof, her magic ability would range far enough to cover the entire sail.

The stern rudder was made of melted iron, and its installation was a bit cumbersome. First, it was required that they put the rudder shaft through a previously made hole, which now laid under water. To steer the ship, Anna welded a triangle plate at the side of the rudder shaft, which ended under water. At the other end of the rudder shaft, which ended on the deck, was melded an iron ring which could freely rotate.

The welding was naturally done by Anna, who was also shocked and puzzled by the fact that a stone bathtub could float on the water. Since she had the same problem like Nightingale, she also

asked the same questions.

So Roland had to answer the questions, again and again. Afterward Anna went to the side and sat down to think about it.

Well ... I have still a long way before me before I will be able to raise the education level.

In the end, Van'er didn't know if it was better to become a gunner or if it was better to stay with the hunter squad.

Everything changed when he got the important order three days ago.

His Royal Highness decided to transfer out some members of the first and second militia team, who performed exceptionally, building a new elite force. When Van'er's name was called, he felt very pleased. But when he was asked if he wants to join Iron Axe's hunter squad or the new gunner squad, he didn't know what to choose. He was aware of the new flintlock, which allowed them to fight against the demonic beasts, due to its much stronger penetrating power than a hand crossbow. Currently, only Iron Axe, the Chief Knight and a number of senior hunters were allowed to use this weapon. Van'er was supposed to join the hunter squad without hesitation, but he instead spoke out of turn and asked, "What is a cannon"?

When he learned that a cannon is ten times as large as a flintlock

and that its power is a hundred times stronger than the strength of a gun he fell into a dilemma.

Apparently, the more powerful the weapon used by oneself is, the higher one's own value is for the Prince. So joining the artillery seems to be the better selection than the hunter squad, but the advantage of carrying a gun is that it is possible to carry it while walking through the town, attracting the eyes of the people, which was always Van'er's dream. Although the cannon's power is ten times that of a gun, surely it isn't possible to carry such a powerful weapon while walking through the streets, right?

Until the last day of the deadline he wasn't sure what to choose, but in the end, he took the artillery. The last point which brought the decision was that the salary of a gunner was five silver royals higher than that of a hunter.

With his decision, the rigorous training began.

A cannon needs five people to operate it, and to Van'er's team were assigned Jop, Cat's Claw, Nelson and Rodney. Since Van'er was previously a vice captain within the first militia team, he was also chosen as the gunner.

Compared to guns, this cannon gave ten times more trouble! Since the beginning of the previous month, Van'er had secretly observed how Iron Axe operated his gun, making it able that he even was able recite the process fluently from memory. But the cannon had to be always switched from the limbered and mobile state into the ready to shoot state, always having to go through the tedious work.

Stop the horse, pull out the pin, pull the hook, move the cannon cart, push it towards the shooting spot, prevent it from dropping, these processes needed five people to cooperate in tandem. Such as when pulling the hook, the other people have to push the support cart away from the cannon, turning it from a four-wheel vehicle into a two wheel vehicle, without that the cannon's barrel would drop to the ground.

When the barrel is finally filled with the ammunition, it's ready to shoot. The shooting is quite similar to the gun and the cannon, but the clean-up of the cannon with its usage of two different mop is much more complicated. When using a gun, the ammunition can directly be put into the barrel. To start the cannon they had to ignite the fuse, but when it's raining, it could be quite difficult to use this weapon, Savannah had thought.

Fortunately, as a gunner most of the time he had to order the others around, and so he didn't need to spend too much effort.

For the first three days, the four newly selected artillery teams had only one cannon to train with. So under Iron Axe' command, the groups had to go through the process of stopping the mount, unloading the cannon, preparing it to shoot, loading the cannon on the cart and then restart the whole process. These four steps were always repeated, Van'er even suspected, that under the uninterrupted cleaning of the cannon, the cannon became even much cleaner than his own face.

Chapter 81 - Artillery Training

Every day Van'er's group had to train for two to three hours with the new weapon, and even after the training was finished, Van'er had to return to the wall to continue his old, boring job. One of the men from Van'er's dormitory had signed up for the new firearms squad, and now he had a brand-new firearm and stood behind him to show off the weapon. If the discipline didn't forbid infighting, Van'er would have already sewn up his hateful mouth.

However, Van'er also thought that there was something fishy.

Didn't my compatriots join the firearms squad only several days ago? Yet, they were allowed to directly start their shooting training through fighting against the demonic beasts, but what about our artillery team? We aren't even authorized to shoot. Moreover, the cannons are so heavy, it's impossible to transport them onto the wall.

When he looked at the top of the wall, he could see that the wall-walk was almost full with people standing side by side in pairs. Usually, everyone was used to running on the inside of the wall-walk. Even if it was steep, it was still better than interfering with teammates' fighting movements. As for cannons... the two wheels alone were wider than the whole wall-walk, and using a cannon to shoot downwards didn't seem very practical.

Could it be... this cannon wouldn't be used to fight against the demonic beasts?

The next exercise confirmed his conjecture.

Iron Axe brought the four artillery teams to the river. There, Van'er discovered-though he didn't know when it happened-an actual, huge "ship"! No... he wasn't sure if it was right to call it a boat. The shell looked to be made out of the same gray stone that was used for building the wall, and its dimension was very wide but short. So in addition to two bare masts, was there any other similarity with a ship? Regarding this point, he and his teammates had a heated discussion.

"This is clearly a pontoon bridge," the first one who came up with a conclusion was Jop, who belonged to the team that followed the ships transporting the ore to Longsong Stronghold. Because of this, he often thought himself well-informed. "They built the deck so wide to make it more stable! During my travels into the south I saw many of them, and if this is a ship, then how can it be moved by the wind? Previously, the river was too wide to ford, and a decade ago the former bridge was washed away by a flood. Now the former bridge should be replaced with this pontoon bridge. They will just place several of them side by side and connect them with an iron chain to make it more stable!

"The furthest place you have traveled to is Longsong Stronghold, yet you call yourself knowledgeable," Rodney sneered, "If this was a pontoon, why would it have two masts? Wouldn't they need to worry about it being blown away by the wind?

"And when you look towards the end, don't you see the steering wheel? pontoons don't need this." Nelson directly jumped into the frying-pan to help Rodney. These two brothers would take every

given opportunity to vent some anger, “In addition, look at the construction between the two masts, doesn’t it seem to be a cabin? it’s just not finished yet. This is a ship, no doubt.

To Van’er this discussion was of little interest, he was only concerned about the next training’s content. To his luck, he soon got his answer when Iron Axe asked them to drag the horses that pulled the cannon towards the Small Town – yes, this was the ship’s name, personally appointed by His Highness. After listening to Iron Axe’s introduction, Jop’s face became suddenly stiff, while the two brothers showed a triumphant expression instead – and then they began to drag the cannon onto the deck of the ship.

On the deck were two groups of stopping poles, each group consisting of four poles. These stopping poles were located in the middle of the deck, with one group behind the other. This apparently indicated that one ship could store two cannons.

Well, with this, Van’er was sure that they wouldn’t be needed to deal with the demonic beasts – the Chishui River flowed from the North to the South, and there wasn’t a large river hidden in the demonic-beastinfested forest.

When they embarked for the first time, they immediately discovered the outstanding stability of the ship. Even though the river flowed quickly around the ship’s hull, the ship was still motionless; it just felt like standing on solid ground. Only when the horses came on the ship did they feel a little swing.

Van’er also noted that when a team finished their firing practice, Iron Axe would count the time and note it down. When Van’er saw

that there were only two places for cannons, it was clear that only the two fastest would get a place on the ship. So, Van'er secretly told his discovery to the rest of his group, which immediately gave rise to their strength, with each person putting at least 10 percent more effort into the training. If they weren't chosen for the artillery team, upon losing much face, their life would become more trifle, but the most important matter was that they wouldn't get improved pay!

Van'er had to wait until the seventh day, but he finally received his first live shooting training.

On this day, His Royal Highness the Prince also came to visit the scene, watching the artillery exercise. Everyone in the four groups walked with a broad chest and large steps.

Because of their training, his group became quite familiar with the loading of the cannon, so it didn't take long until the first shot was fired by Van'er's team.

This was the first time he saw the power of a cannon. With a deafening roar, the cannon ball was shot out and landed around 500m away in the snow, blasting a lot of snow and mud into the air, and afterwards, it bounced once more into the air. With his eyes, it was impossible for Van'er to track the iron ball.

Seeing this, Van'er wondered how the Prince, managed to create such a terrible weapon. If you had to face artillery attacks, even with body armor, I am afraid it would be to no avail.

After each shot, the group was changed and the Prince ordered someone to mark the landing position. Afterwards, he let someone measure the distance between the muzzle and the flag. After four rounds, it was finally Van'er's turn again, but then he heard the command to change the cannon's angle.

A scale marked with 0, 5, 10, 25, and 30 was placed at the cannon's end, where the cart was connected. Although Van'er saw this scale, he didn't understand what it meant, but as long as they just followed the instructions, everything would be alright. Iron Axe shouted, "Shoot at the angle of 5!" Hearing this command, Jop, who was the one with the greatest strength in Van'er's team, took the ramrod, inserted it into the muzzle, waited for them to open the hook which held the barrel at the right angle, and pressed it upwards until the scale showed 5 and snapped the hook in.

Compared with the angle of the barrel at the beginning, where the barrel was a little low, the barrel now pointed a little higher. This showed that the scale marked how high or low the barrel's muzzle pointed into the sky.

When everything was ready, every group fired one more shot with the new angle, and after every shot, the distance was also measured.

Van'er could gradually understand what the Prince did.

He recorded the distance of every shot fired, and the higher the angle of the barrel, the higher the iron ball would fly.

This was a point where Van'er could use his experience from shooting with a bow, the higher up the aim, the further the arrow would fly. The flatter the shooting angle, the earlier the arrow would hit the ground. However, he hadn't thought about that in the case of the cannon. Just because it is faster, the flying distance would be so much further. Suddenly, he got this crazy idea-if the iron ball got faster and faster, would it be possible that it would never stop?

At Chishui River, Little Town's testing phase was also underway.

Since Wendy would act as the ship's driving force, the ship's personnel needed to be absolutely reliable. So, Roland picked some people who already knew about the witches as the first crew of Little Town. Carter became the captain, the helmsman was Brian, the sailors who had to set the sails were Carter's subordinates, and the job of correspondent went to Titus Pyne, Nana's father. These people often came into contact with the witches, so coupled with their own mental transformation where they got rid of their prejudice against the witches, there shouldn't be a problem. In the case of Sir Pyne, it was even less the case, since his beloved daughter was a witch.

Chapter 82 - Little Town's First Voyage

Since Lightning was the only one who had any practical experience with sailing, she was assigned the duty of serving as navigator.

In addition, she was also interested in the barge with its strange shape and unique construction material. Although it looked very crude, it had every important part needed for a ship and was able to move, but she wasn't allowed to steer it herself. After all, for most of her time at sea, she had only been a bystander since her father had always refused her requests to steer the ship.

In accordance to tradition, Lightning smashed a bottle of wheat wine on the ship's bow for the ship's first departure, and then she gave the order to set sail. Carter, as the captain, was naturally reluctant to let the little girl snatch his position as commander, so whenever she gave a command, the knight would follow up with the same command.

The sails of Little Town were sewn out of animal skin, with cowhide and sheepskin accounting for the majority of the sails, but they were also mixed with some of Border Town's specialties, like wolf skin, bear skin, and the like. So the sail had many different kinds of colors-brown, gray and white, just like a sail patched together out of many rags. The sails were trapezoidal, and were divided by four separate beams. At the top of the sail, a cable went through the iron rings to connect it with the mast, while the bottom just fell onto the deck. One just had to pull the cable to raise the entire sail.

In order to make operating the ship as simple as possible, Little Town only had two sails that were parallel to each other and perpendicular to the middle line. In general, if a two-masted sailboat were to be constructed in this way, it would only be able to catch very little wind, almost making the second mast irrelevant. But with Wendy's ability to control the wind, this design would let her distribute her power evenly on both sides of the center line, making it more convenient for the helmsman to change the direction of the ship.

When Lightning saw that the sail was set, she commanded the dockworkers on land to untie the rope. At the moment, the weather was very good. The snow that fell occasionally was driven by light wind just like the water as the ship slowly left the shore.

The little girl descended to Brian's side and ordered, "Right on full rudder!"

Carter also shouted, "Right on full rudder!"

"Uh, what does this right rudder mean?" Brian scratched his head and asked, "How many right circles?"

"No, you have to turn the steering-wheel left around," said Lightning, while walking away. "Come on, or do I have to come over?"

She had forgotten that it was the first time for these people to control a ship, so they even didn't understand the basics of any instructions. If this was a standard brig, I'm afraid they wouldn't

even be able to roll out the sails. With less than ten people, they were still able to drive the ship offshore, which was only possible due to the ship's unique design.

Lightning took the wheel handle which was even higher than her, and with her feet off the ground, she rotated it left around – this huge transverse steering wheel was very heavy for ordinary women to turn. In the absence of mechanical power and under-equivalent power transmission, she had to overcome the entirety of the water resistance when moving the massive iron rudder. However, since Lightning could fly, this was no problem for her. She noted that there was a thin piece installed at the base of the rudder to prevent the rudder from overturning, so she couldn't help but wonder, I heard that the ship is the Prince's original design, so how can it be that he even knows this detail? Even sailors who had stayed at sea all year round did not necessarily know the structures of the various parts of the ship.

“Sister Wendy, you can start producing your wind.”

Wendy, who stood at the top of the cabin, didn't know whether she should laugh or cry, so this was the true reason why His Highness had asked me if I'm afraid of heights. So now, I should power the ship with my ability? When thinking about her usual boring life, such as drying meat or clothes, this gave her a subtle feeling of contrast. She opened her hands, going into her usual practice state, and let the wind blow from her feet to her head equally, balancing the wind as much as possible when blowing it into both sides of the sail.

To be honest, Wendy did not expect that this seemingly simple

task would be so difficult to operate.

Although she had awoken as a witch fifteen years ago, she had never tried to gain a deeper understanding and control of her power. Whether it was to call the wind to attack the enemy or to summon a storm to sweep the enemy away, those were one-time releases of a large amount of magic. In the camp, when doing the chores, she only had to sometimes use a lot of power, but as long as the goal could be achieved, she hadn't to use much. Now thinking about Anna, who was always earnestly using her power, Wendy suddenly felt a little ashamed.

“The first thing you have to do is to practice your ability over and over again until you can control it entirely – just like Anna.”

These aren't empty words. Then from now on I will start to... Wendy took a deep breath and focused all of her attention on creating the wind.

Although the wind was not perfectly balanced, the sails were still bulging, and under the steady stream of wind, the mast gave off a squeaking sound, and the bow began to turn right.

“It's really moving!” Carter exclaimed.

“His Royal Highness was able to turn stone into a boat, and let it float on the water,” Sir Pyne laughed and asked, “Is there something he can't do?”

Little Town moved farther and farther away from the shore, gradually moving towards the middle of the river.

Wendy could produce wind out of nothing, but she wasn't able to make the existing North wind disappear, so the wind came from two directions, making it impossible to have the ship move in a straight line by only using her power. So, they also had to rely on steering to adjust the direction of the ship. Lightning wasn't able to teach Brian by words only, this was something Brian had to experience himself. In order to let him master this feeling as soon as possible, the little girl's first orders were to change the direction of the ship often so that he could learn the relationship between the rotation angle of the steering wheel and the swing of the bow while she herself only made small adjustments.

After navigating for more than one hour over the Chishui River, Wendy wasn't able to hold on any longer.

It wasn't that she ran out of magic power, but instead it was her body, that had reached its limit.

Even though her body was wrapped into so many layers that she looked like a dumpling, it still wasn't able completely resist the invasion of the cold wind. A layer of snow had already accumulated on top of her cotton cap and she already could no longer feel her hands and feet while standing on the shaky roof. If it wasn't for Lightning who saw her sway strangely, maybe she would have fallen into coma.

So Lightning quickly flew towards Wendy and seized her body while shouting to Brian that he should sail back towards the docks.

The latter steered the wheel into the right direction, letting the ship slowly turn leftwards. Lightning flew down from the cabin while carrying Wendy. Down on the deck, they only had the sails to save them from the wind, but at least it wasn't as cold as before so they were able to save their body temperature. Moreover, when they wanted to reach the shore, it would need a person with fine control, and Lightning would never dare to let a rookie take over this important task – even though she had never done it herself.

When they finally landed and the river bank collided with the hull, creating a loud sound, all the people's hearts on board began to race. Even though it sounded alarming when the hull collided with the shore, it didn't look too bad in the end. The sailor quickly folded the sails together and put up a gangplank to climb ashore.

Fortunately, they weren't able to sail in a straight line during their trial journey, so thanks to their U-turn training on the spacious river, they weren't so far away from Border Town.

Lightning flew towards the castle while carrying Wendy. Carter looked at the stone ship and loudly sighed. Without the help of a witch, he didn't want to try to sail the ship back to the docks.

Chapter 83 - The Northern Coachman

Winter was the time of no harvest for most people of the North, especially near the Hermes Plateau. The Months of the Demons not only brought endless wind and snow but furthermore brought cold, hunger, and death. However, for “False Leg” White, Winter meant something different. Every winter, the Church’s envoy would come to his door to let him drive several turns to the west border of the kingdom. On the way to the border, he would collect suffering orphans with his carriage and bring them to the old Holy City.

For him, this was a good deal since he would almost earn twenty silver royals for each trip to the border. What was even better was that he could also accumulate merits of doing good work. It was almost the end of this year’s Months of the Demons, so this turn should be the last run of this season.

“Your honor, please go back to the carriage and stay inside. Outside, it will still snow for a long time, so you don’t need to eat the wind and drink the snow every day like I do. You aren’t allowed to freeze.”

“This is nothing,” the Church’s messenger contradicted White and took a big gulp out of his jug before continuing, “In the new Holy City it can be much colder than it is here. At the plateau, leather clothes and armor aren’t able to stop the cold. If you are there, the cold will come through every opening and drill into every part of your body. Without the usage of cold pills, no ordinary people can survive at that place.

“What you said should be right,” White nodded, he hadn’t been to the new Holy City, and he also didn’t plan to go there. Since only the cold and the demonic beasts existed there, why should I go there? However, as an experienced coachman, it was easy for him to find another topic to speak about, a subject that would be preferred by the envoy. “Your gloves should be made from the leather of the wolves native to the west border of the Kingdom of Graycastle, right?”

“Oh? You can see that?”

“Hey, my lord, I’ve been doing this work for thirty years,” White proudly said, “first for the baron, then for the countess, and later even for the Wolfsheart Kingdom’s little princess. If it were not for the accident where I broke my legs, maybe I would still be working for the count’s house. They had nothing besides plenty of gold royals and paid excellently for Graycastles’s fur and silverware, jewelry from the Kingdom of Eternal Winter, and the fjord’s handicrafts. They demanded so much that I could never deliver enough.”

“So,” the Ambassador nodded, “this is the origin of your nickname? In what kind of accident were you involved in?”

“Well, it was a refugee riot. The group of thugs didn’t stop for anything as long as they could get something to eat from it,” White disdainfully answered. He spat on the ground, “When they surrounded the carriage, I had no other choice than to urge the horse to run if I wanted to save the countess. But, it got frightened, threw me down, and turned over the carriage.

“So you broke your leg?” the Ambassador curiously asked, “but what happened to the countess?”

“She got away since there were many cushions and thick quilts inside the carriage, so she got some light bruises,” White barked, “She just crawled out of the carriage and left me on the road to die. On my broken leg, I dragged my body home.” He slapped his hand against the brass stick that showed from under his cut-off trousers.” However, the count’s house threw me out on the pretext that I could not drive anymore, those damn aristocrats!”

“What a pity,” the Ambassador paused, “but God did not abandon you, now you are driving for the Church.”

“Yes sir.” Answered White, but inside, he thought, No. If God were merciful, he wouldn’t let me do this. Instead, he would have saved me when I needed him the most.

At this moment, the cry of a young girl could be heard. “We need a little pause.”

Hearing this, White pulled at the reins so that the two horses gradually stopped. At the moment the carriage had stopped, the ambassador jumped down and went to its back. Soon, a whip crack could be heard from behind the carriage.

Poor child, thought White as he sighed, you have to endure it, this is your savior. If it weren’t for the Church’s envoy who always supported me through the winter, I would only be an unattended corpse at the side of the road.

Soon, the ambassador came back, climbed up, and sat beside White and only commanded, “Go.”

“Brace yourselves, I am driving!” shouted White as he shook his reins, removing the carriage. “Are they all from the Wolfsheart Kingdom?”

“Almost, the churches in every town in the Kingdom takes in some of the orphans especially during the winter, when there is a food and clothing shortage everywhere. We receive many times more people compared to the other seasons because of this. If we only depended on our Church’s own members, it wouldn’t be enough, so we have to employ some drivers with good reputations to help us to transport the orphans to the Oldy Holy City. Until now you have done very well, White. My predecessor could only praise you.”

“It is my privilege to be part of such a good deed,” said White, honored. “Your excellency, will they also be sent to the monastery? I hate to ask, though they are orphans, their characters aren’t the same. Although some of them aren’t so old, some of them have already done terrible deeds, so won’t these people contaminate the pure and holy earth?”

“God will judge them, and even if they are guilty, they will get the opportunity of salvation.” answered the envoy with complete conviction.

“Will they? That’s a good thing.” Wright was amazed, but soon

he raised his head and looked at the sky before he continued. “It’s late. Sir, shall we stay in the next town? If the weather tomorrow is good, we will arrive at the Old Holy City at noon.”

“It’s already this late?” asked the Ambassador, “Look for an inn, and after you bring the carriage to the yard you can prepare the food for the orphans.”

“Okay!” White agreed to the plan.

This town belonged to the Wolfsheart Kingdom, and if someone wanted to reach the Old Holy City, they had to go through this town. So, it wasn’t White’s first time here. Thanks to this, he quickly found the inn he had previously frequented. He drove the carriage into the yard and then took some coins from the Church’s envoy to buy some food for the orphans. As usual, he bought sweet potato porridge, which was the most appropriate choice since it was cheap and still had a pretty good taste. After watching them divide the porridge, White limped back to the inn, asked for some bread with butter, and sat at the bar to eat. As for the envoy, he certainly had a better place to go.

If White hadn’t broken his leg ten years ago, he would have gone to the tavern to order a glass of wine, and he would also have thrown some dice – he had always had a good hand for them. But now... White took his purse and found his room to sleep early.

Later, in the evening, he heard some voices from the yard. So, he got up and lifted the curtains to control the situation. But White only saw that the Church’s drunken envoy had come back. The envoy opened the door of the carriage and went into it. Soon he

returned outside, pulling two orphans with him. Beside the carriage, two people dressed in aristocratic clothes were already waiting.

Seeing that it was only the envoy, White put the curtain down and went back under the warm blanket.

This wasn't the first time he witnessed the envoy doing this. Actually, it was a regular thing for him. Being alive is the greatest happiness, he thought, they have just to endure the pain for the moment. You only have to survive until we reach the Old Holy City, there you will be able to start a new life. At least in the monastery, you won't have to fear starving. Thinking until here, White yawned and soon fell asleep.

At dawn, he got the envoy and drove on. The last part of the journey went without incident, and they even reached the Old Holy City two hours sooner than expected. There were already other church's carriages waiting for them; it seemed that these poor devils still had some way to go, but all this had nothing to do with him.

"This is your reward." The envoy called to White and threw a bag toward him.

White took the coins out of the bag and counted them twice. Indeed, it was twenty silver royals. So he nodded and said, "I hope I will see you again in the coming year."

But the envoy did not answer. Instead, he waved his hand to

indicate that White could depart.

White noticed that in addition to him, several other coachmen were doing the same job. Are they the from the other Kingdoms? He asked himself, but soon he noticed something strange, it seemed only girls would come down from the carriages. So when the church adopts orphans, they only adopt girls?

He shook his head, threw this problematic thought to the back of his head, and started the journey back home.

Chapter 84 - The Truth Behind Hermes

Bishop Mayne followed the circular staircase leading into the earth.

The staircase, with a depth of at least of four times that of the cathedral's highest tower and a diameter of about twenty feet, was built in a natural doline and lead directly into a strategically-positioned and spacious castle. The beginning of the staircase was well lit by skylight pathing through the windows of the high dome above, giving the twisting and turning stone walls an icy color.

But when following the steps, the stairway quickly darkened, seemingly fusing the walls into one. But after some time at the center of the staircase, the reflection of a blue light could be seen, and the deeper one went, the brighter it would become. So even without a torch, they would never fall into a pitch-black predicament.

At the foot of the staircase, a pathway that was firmly attached to the rock wall meandered around a dark hole.

The path was cut out of granite, formed by many rectangular pieces three fingers thick. The path was wide enough for two people walk side by side. One end of each granite piece was embedded into the rock wall while the other end was in the air. In order to prevent accidental falls, there were wooden fence posts that were connected by rope at the side of the hole..

Mayne didn't count the number of steps he walked. In the end,

there were just too many, but he knew that embedding every piece of stone was a tough task. The masons hired by the Church had to lean on a rope to hang down while they knocked out suitably deep holes in the hard rock. Afterwards, they had to insert the granite plates into the holes. Each action had to be done very carefully because every rope slippage or breakage lead to a fall to the bottom, which happened to more than three hundred people.

If the Church's Cathedral on the surface was a symbol for the unyielding spirit of the church, then the hidden castle in the Hermes plateau was the real core of the Church.

A piece of God's Stone of Retaliation was embedded at the edge of every step, and a guard was placed on every hundredth step. For last line of defense, there was even a squadron of the God's Punishment Army that was always ready to face an attack from intruders. Many bags of sand and gravel were buried between the Cathedral and the underground castle. This was in case every line of defense in the Holy City had failed. If every important person was evacuated, the pope could start the trap and bury everything under a deep layer of sand and gravel.

Although it wasn't Mayne first visit to the underground castle, the feeling of walking on air still made him feel dizzy. Especially after some time, he would always have the illusion of falling.

So he was a little relieved when he finally had once more solid ground under his feet.

At the bottom of the sinkhole was a huge white stone disc, with a surface as smooth as a mirror. When standing above it, someone

could even clearly see their own reflection. Through a cleverly designed construction, the light coming through the windows within the dome was so reflected that it directly hit the millstone. Thanks to this, even without lighting a torch, the bottom of the doline was never dark.

When reaching the bottom of the doline, they would discover that the sun is not colorless. After being reflected by the grindstone, the light would become blue, yet when looking upwards, the blue light would let the sinkhole shine in a cool color. But when taking a closer look, someone would discover that there were countless dust particle flying upwards, just like the minute creatures recorded within the ancient book.

The holes within the wall of the mountain were caves formed by nature, and the church only opened up the entries, to further expand and built the Hermes castle. But thanks to theses holes which extended in all directions, the air could flow freely, so that the air at the bottom of the doline didn't feel rotten or oppressive.

When Mayne stepped through the door into the castle's main area, he was suddenly surrounded by a strong defense force. There were five soldiers called Judges, who guarded every entryway – the Judges were the Church's most loyal soldiers, once they were accepted into this group and started their work, they would forever live in the castle, never able to return to the surface.

In fact, only he and the pope were able to enter and later exit the castle, even the two archbishops Heather and Tayfun weren't allowed to enter here.

But even Mayne didn't know how many channels the castle had. In addition to the main channel leading south, there were many side branches leading away from the main branch, and when following this side channels, they would split again into many more branches. Some were used by the Church, while others were sealed. He had heard, that during the construction of the castle, a few artisans strayed into those channels not marked as safe, which led to them becoming lost, never able to find their way back.

The vertical main channel led directly to the depths of the mountain, around every three hundred feet (about 100 meters), Mayne had to cross a checkpoint. He knew that the Church was using each segment between two checkpoints for a different task. The most outside area was used as the living area for the warriors who had to stay their whole life in the castle. The second segment was used as archives, for the storage of instruments, and fragments of ancient books. The third section was the jail area, where prisoners were housed who weren't allowed to see the light ever again... innocents included.

After crossing through the third checkpoint, Mayne stopped. Further in, was the castle's secret area. All of the Church's research materials and inventions originated from this place, and without the Pope's authorization, no one was allowed to enter. Since he became the Archbishop three years ago, he had only stepped into this area once before.

When Mayne walked closer he took the left path.

After a short walk, the way was ended by a door, with a plate at the height of the chest on it on which read "Elders!"

Mayne nodded to the guards and ordered, “Open the door.”

Behind the door, the corridor continued. There were burning torches hanging on the wall, like small sparks of light within a sea of darkness, continuing along the path until the end. On both sides of the road were many wooden doors and in the middle of each door hung a plate with a number on it.

One of the Judges who followed Mayne raised a torch to illuminate the surroundings. While walking down the channel, Mayne looked all the while at the numbers on the plates. When he finally saw the number 35 mottled into the plate, he stopped and pulled a key out of one of his pockets and inserted it into the keyhole, turning it lightly. At the bottom of the doline, the sound of opening the lock was especially harsh, and its echo could be heard even at the end of the channel. As if it was a signal flare, suddenly many cries could be heard through the doors, there were calls from men and women. When listening carefully, Mayne could understand some of them! “Quickly save me!” “Help me!” “Please, kill me!” and the like.

But Mayne was unmoved by the cries. He only ordered the guard standing beside the door to immediately shut it after he entered the room, leaving the chaos of screams outside.

Behind iron rails the bishop saw an old man sitting on his bed – perhaps he was not so old, but now his hair had already turned white, and his face was covered by wrinkles. His beard looked like he hadn’t groomed it in a long time, almost reaching up to his neck. Since he hadn’t seen the sun for a long time, his skin had

become terribly pale, and his hands and feet were as thin as bamboo.

Mayne glanced at the food plate behind the rails, which looked like it hadn't been touched, registering this he sighed, "You should treat yourself better, the Church doesn't lack for food. And the meals are even made according to a king's standard, except for the wine. Even the fish, it's first-rate Cod coming from Port of Bluewater. You should be familiar with its taste, right Your Majesty King Wimbledon?"

Chapter 85 - Thorny Road

It took a moment before the old man showed a reaction, he slowly lifted up his quilt, moved it to the bedside and looked in the direction of the Archbishop.

Then he opened his mouth and asked: “If it were you who was locked up in this damnable place, do you think you would be able to eat?” His voice wasn’t easy to understand, it sounded like his throat had been blocked by something, “Half a year, I’m already trapped here for six months, without any news... Tell me how are my sons and daughters doing?”

When taking a closer look at the cell, Mayne noticed, that it seemed like one wall was scored with a nail. Is the old man using this method to calculate the date?

He moved to a chair facing the King and then asked in return: “Why ask about things that will only make you unhappy?”

“...” The King kept his silence for a long while, but eventually spoke, “It doesn’t matter to me, after all, you will kill me anyway, right?”

Mayne only answered with one word, “Yes.”

“Then as a dying man, what does pleasure mean to me, before I die, I just want to know their situation!” The longer Wimbledon spoke the more his voice resembled a growl.

In the end, what else should I expect? Mayne thought, after all, as a king, he had learned to have a strong spirit and demeanor. When the King had been kidnapped and replaced by a devout, on the road to Hermes, he had repeatedly tried to break free. Then when he was imprisoned, he wasn't corrupted by madness, instead, he had always tried to negotiate his freedom. Even during all the abuse, he never released a scream, which was very rare in this jail. If it wasn't impossible to change the plan, Mayne really wouldn't want to waste such a person whose only bad point was being on the wrong side of their conspiracy.

Perhaps since I had already personally come, I should just inform him about the status quo, the Archbishop thought, otherwise, I could just voice the command, and the next moment one of the Judges can come and end his life.

So Mayne finally slowly said, "Your eldest son, Gerald is already dead. He was beheaded by your second son, Timothy, on charges of treason. Your third daughter Garcia has declared the independence of the southern border region, conferring herself as the Queen of Clearwater, so a war between her and Timothy is inevitable. As for your fourth son and your fifth daughter, we do not get much information about them. Well... they are still alive.

"What are you talking about, rebellion? Independence? What did you do?" asked the King enraged.

"We let them fight out who would become the next king," explained Mayne with pleasure, "we spread your children throughout the whole kingdom, and declared whoever governed

their territory the best would become the next king.”

Hearing this, Wimbledon closed his eyes in pain, trying to shut out the world. After a long time, he finally whispered, “Why do you do all this? You took advantage of the prayer day, brought me into the compartment to pray in isolation, there you stripped me of my clothes... and also took my God’s Stone of Retaliation. Then you used the ability of a witch to replace me with another person. So with this replacement, you could have obviously slowly taken over the country, let the Church gain control of every town. So why did you need to give out the order for the Battle of the Throne?! I, I cannot... Keke”, because he got more and more enraged, he began to cough severely, shaking throughout his whole body.

“We just couldn’t issue the command which would lead to massacring your children one after another!” Mayne continued his verbal attack to finish off the former King. “Maybe you wouldn’t have worked against us, but your children mostly wouldn’t act the way you want them to. They would grow up, develop, and have their own thoughts. Just like you see from your third daughter, Garcia. She already started her project to take over the Port of Clearwater five years ago, so even without the Battle of the Throne, at the point when you would naturally die, do you think she would just stand at the side and look how Gerald would ascend the throne? But the most important reason for us to act, was that we don’t have the time to wait for the natural cause to get rid of you, you should have already noted that the power of the witch isn’t permanent.”

“Damn you, what would the Church get from the fight between my children? The Church will also sink into a sea of fire, many of

their believers will get killed during the war, and the kingdom will become a total mess...” talking until here, Wimbledon suddenly got a distracted look, not believing his upcoming thought “Do you want to –” another burst of severe coughs interrupted the king’s speech once more. When he was finally able to speak again, his voice became as thin as a gossamer, as if that array of coughing had consumed all his remaining energy, “You... want to destroy the royal family!”

“Exactly, but it would be more accurately to speak about the royal power.” Mayen couldn’t help himself from praising the king within his heart for his keen judgment. Even after staying for six months in the completely dark dungeon, by not losing his consciousness he could already be regarded as strong willed, but he has even managed to keep his intelligence. The only other people who would be able to do this can be counted on one hand,

“The monarchy will always be a hinderance to the development of the Church, no matter how weak it becomes, it will always rise again just like weed. So only by completely eradicating it, will the Church be able to ‘genuinely’ control the Kingdom.”

“...” suddenly Wimbledon looked a lot more aged, previously only his outer appearance seemed to be old, but now it seemed that his spirit had left him and his eyes dimmed.

“The Kingdom of Graycastle is the kingdom with the largest territory in the mainland, it has also the largest number of soldiers, so in the case of a full-frontal war, my church can only be at a disadvantage. We had already planned all this for a long time now. During a civil war, your kingdom will lose a lot of soldiers

and mercenaries, after waiting for only two to three years, our God's Punishment Army will be able to easily take over the whole territory of your Kingdom. But you don't need to be sad, your kingdom isn't the only one we are subjugating. The other three kingdoms are all facing the same situation. Soon the mainland will no longer have the four kingdoms. Instead of the "Wolfsheart Kingdom", the "Kingdom of Eternal Winter", "Kingdom of Dawn" and the "Kingdom of Graycastle", there will be only one regime, "the Church", ruling over all the countries."

Wimbledon turned completely silent, the man who had won the throne from his brother by force of arms was now like a man who had lost his life, even for Mayne it was hard to bear, but in his mind, he hadn't the slightest thought of regret. The Church had also invested a lot into this plan – a large number of outstanding believers had been willingly used as pawns, regardless of the danger to themselves.

For example, the man who had played Wimbledon III was a devoted member of the Judges. He was a strong believer and absolutely loyal to the Church, and would have originally received the transformation ceremony, becoming a member of the God's Punishment Army. However, in order to complete the mission, he got his appearance changed by a witch into that of you. So when he died in the castle he didn't receive any honor. Before the mission, he could have carved his name on top of the Church's monument on Hermes, but now the Church could only bury his name forever.

When Mayne came to the conclusion that Wimbledon wouldn't speak any further, he took a small porcelain bottle out of a pocket and gave it to him to drink.

When Wimbledon had collected himself and drank the potion, he spoke his final words, “Curse...”

“Yes?” asked Mayne, waiting for the King to continue.

“I curse you... I’ll be waiting for you in the depths of hell.” Wimbledon’s voice grew fainter with every word, in the end, Mayne had even to concentrate if he wanted to understand what was said.

“It’s a pity that there is no hell in this world. Even if there is one, it isn’t a place where I belong to. Everything we are doing is for the continuing of humanity. Only by unifying the four Kingdoms, are we able to get enough power to confront the true enemy, or else...” The Archbishop stopped his speech when he saw that Wimbledon’s hand had lost all of its strength and had fallen to the ground, his head twisted to one side, and his chest stopped to move.

This was the end of a king, but it’s our beginning, he thought.

Mayne took up the bottle and put it back into his pocket. Then he opened the door and stepped into the quiet corridor, which gave the feeling like there had never been any cries. He only explained to the member of the Judges how to deal with the aftermath, and then he left the castle without looking back even once.

Chapter 86 - The Choice Of The Witches

Leaves didn't know how long she could still hold on. Her return to the camp in the Impassable Mountain Range from the wildland took her nearly half a month. In order to avoid detection by demonic beasts, she carefully hid inside the thick and solid trunk of a tree to confirm that there were no demonic beast activity within the vicinity before running to the next place to hide. Despite her worry of the slow marching speed, she had no other choice. Once she was detected by demonic beasts, she wouldn't be able to survive alone.

More than a dozen sisters had fallen under the attack of the Devils, and the sisters who survived weren't good at fighting. During the time when Ironhand jumped into the crowd and started his massacre, they had scattered in all directions, but in the end, there were only a few who were still alive and able to come back to the camp. Thinking of all the death, the pain within Leaves' heart didn't stop.

The action of having to always hide herself during the escape consumed a large amount of magic power, thus she was only able to cover a distance of ten miles daily. In particular, she always had to save enough power to survive the night. Since all of the rations she had at hand were eaten, she also had to look for wild fruits to sate her constant hunger. In addition, the heat spell within her Witches Cooperation Association emblem had also run out of power, so she could only use bark to wrap tightly around herself. Every time she thought about the deaths of the young witches, who weren't even allowed to mature and who she had promised to protect, she couldn't stop her tears from falling.

And as if all of this wasn't enough, during one night, when she was wrapped in her tree trunk she was constantly attacked by the demon's bite – after the constant attack of mental and physical blows, she had completely forgotten about this. Suddenly, she felt as if her chest was torn open, and the pain quickly spread throughout her whole body. The pain attacked her so suddenly that she almost instantly lost her consciousness. She was only able to fight back when she bit her tongue and tasted the blood flowing in her mouth. Under the constant torture, Leaves thought of giving up several times, but the thought of the possibility that more than twenty fleeing sisters, with serious injuries which only she was able to heal, were waiting in the camp for her return gave her the power to fight against the bite.

Fortunately, she didn't have to suffer for a long time under the demon's bite. When she finally broke out from the suffering, she discovered that the tree trunk surrounding her body had a huge gap. Even worse, it was wet with her blood. So in order for the smell of her not to be discovered by demonic beasts she had to fight against the pain and exhaustion and take off her clothes before fleeing to another tree. At the same time, she grew some green leaves on a bare branch and sewed warm clothes out of them. Under the guidance of her magic, the branch became a needle and the leaves veins became her thread.

During her escape, she couldn't eat either cooked food or drink warm water. When she finally entered the Impassable Mountain Range, she even added two additional layers of leaves to her clothes, tightly wrapping both her hands and feet, but all this wasn't enough against the rapidly falling temperature and the ankle-deep snow, resulting in frostbite at her toes. So with this way of stopping and dragging on, with no feeling in her feet, she finally managed to return to the camp.

At the moment she saw the familiar figure of one of her sisters, Leaves fell to the ground, unconscious.

When she woke up two days later, due to the long time that her feet had been exposed to the low temperatures, her injuries had become so serious that even her own herbal medicine couldn't stop the spreading gangrene. They had no other choice than to take the last resort and cut off two toes from both her right and left foot.

These sacrifice didn't bother Leaves much, since she was able to survive. Compared to those sisters who had never come back, she was very lucky. However, when she saw that her surviving sisters' arms were all wrapped in white clothes, great sorrow spread out uncontrollably from the bottom of her heart.

At the moment of departure, there was already only forty-two sisters, but now there were only six survivors.

When Leaves was finally able to calm down, she asked the others how they they fared.

As she already knew, during their fight with the devils, the witches with abilities incapable of combat took the opportunity to escape to the camp in the Impassable Mountain Range. During their first night, they were attacked by demonic beasts – a group consisting of wild boar species. Everyone who was unable to fight had to flee once more. The fact that they were already attacked again by a group of demonic beasts was clearly a bad omen, but there was nothing they could do against it. The next morning,

after a new attack from wolf-like shaped demonic beasts, only eight witches were able to escape. Fortunately, after they had entered the Impassable Mountain Range, the demonic beasts weren't able to keep up.

When they had finally reached the camp some days ago, two sisters were attacked by the demon's bite. Maybe it was because the traumatic experiences of the last few days were too great and the future prospect was too dark, but they didn't have the will to fight and weren't able to survive the demon's bite. Since there was no battle witch who was able to come back, everyone had thought that they had died under the hands of the devils, so no one had expected that Leaves would come back.

Finally, someone asked, "So... what happened to our other sisters? Scarlet, Windseeker, and furthermore our mentor Cara, did they survive like you?"

Leaves shook her head and whispered, "I am the only one who survived."

"Do you..." Scroll quietly began to speak, but since she could already guess the answer she said instead, "Then you have a good rest. Also..." She hesitated for a moment, "Leaves, there is one more point."

"What?" asked Leaves, exhausted.

"When you were in a coma, we sisters had talked and come to the conclusion that in the case that Cara doesn't come back, we hope

that you will take the position of our mentor.”

Suddenly being asked this question, Leaves became distracted so she closed her eyes to think. Well, yes, our Witch Cooperation Association has suffered such a fatal blow, if we do not immediately select a new leader, I’m afraid we will soon fall apart. But the purpose of our society was to seek the Holy Mountain and obtain freedom and peace. Now the search for the Holy Mountain is over. No, the “Holy Mountain” itself is a hoax. It does not exist in the Impassable Mountain Range, nor in the wild lands. Then, why should our society continue to exist?

Leaves’ mind was in total chaos. Even so, she wasn’t looking at them, but she could still feel the eyes of her sisters, waiting for her answer. Her sisters needed a person to lead them and guide them forward, someone who hadn’t already given up.

After long silence, Leaves finally spoke, “We... will go looking for Nightingale.”

Hearing her decision, the other sisters began to shout in disorder.

“What, why should we go looking for her?”

“Do you mean we should also go to Border Town?”

“What if she lied to us?”

“Wendy is there too.”

“She might have died long ago.”

Having enough of the chaos, Scroll clapped her hands, let the others quiet down, and then she asked Leaves, “What should we do if what Nightingale said is also a hoax?”

“You can wait outside of the town, far enough to be safe,” answered Leaves as she opened her eyes, “Let me find out the situation first before determining if Nightingale had lied. So, for now, I will take the post of Mentor, but if... if I die in town, Scroll will take over command and lead the sisters to safety.”

“But I...” began Scroll, but she was soon interrupted by Leaves.

“I know your ability is not suitable for fighting, and your ability is not much help for the daily operation of the camp. But now I understand that the strength of the ability isn’t important for the rank of leader.” The Mentor should be a guide, instead of being the strongest, but unfortunately, it is too late for us now. If the cautious and patient Wendy was our Mentor, wouldn’t the outcome have been complete different? “You and Wendy were the first to join the Witch Cooperation Association, so you are already an elder sister. You crossed the whole kingdom on your march from the east to reach the Impassable Mountain Range, so you have a lot of experience. You are cautious, and you don’t think you are better than everyone else. So, there is no one who is better suited to be the mentor of us sisters than you.

Afterwards, Scroll was silent for a moment until she said, “...

What if what Nightingale said is true?”

“Then there is no reason why our Witch Cooperation Association should exist any longer,” Leaves slowly explained, “after all, that would mean Border Town is our ‘Holy Mountain’!”

Chapter 87 - Winter Twilight (Part 1)

“Ready –! Strike!”

Hearing this command, Van’er put all of his strength into striking at his target with his pike. He held it with both hands, and as he hit the wolf’s head, the pike gave off a cracking sound. The wolf had fluffy fur and its eyes were copper-red. When it opened its mouth, Van’er saw two rows of fangs in which the largest fangs were as big as his thumb. It was the first time that he had come so close in contact with a demonic beast, while it was trying to hit him with its claws, it was even throwing snowflakes at his face.

Van’er felt like his brain had gone blank and he was acting on instincts learned during training, like subconsciously gripping the pike tighter continuing to drive the pike further. Van’er suddenly got the feeling that time was flowing slower; he saw that the pike had bowed to its maximum. However, the pike wasn’t able to penetrate deep enough into the demonic beast’s belly, giving Van’er the thought that the wolf’s sharp claws would tear his cheeks open.

Suddenly a “bang” was heard. The pike wasn’t able to withstand the momentum of the wolf, and finally broke into two pieces. At the same moment of the breaking sound, the time flow turned back to normal and the wolf fell down – its claws landed on the city wall, scraping a series of marks into the debris. The other half of Van’er’s pike smashed onto the city wall along with the wolf.

“Guns, loading is complete!”

“Fire at will!”

Suddenly a gun barrel was extended on each side of Van’er. Seeing this, Van’er stepped a half step back as fast as possible and raised his head to avoid the smoke and debris that would hit his eyes. As for saving his ears, he had no time for it.

Soon after the gunfire subsided, Van’er stepped back to the front, where he discovered that a number of demonic beasts at the wall’s base laid, slain. The one Van’er had stabbed laid also between them. When he turned his head, he could see his roommate proudly grinning at him.

One only needs a week to learn to use your weapon, so there is nothing to be proud about. Van’er took only a glance, then he switched his line of sight back to the battlefield. In a situation like this, His Highness’ artillery team would come in handy, but at this time they still had to rely on these crutches.

“Your pike is broken, so take this new one.” Cat’s Paw handed Van’er a new pike, “Is this group of demonic beasts crazy? They’ve been attacking us for two to three hours already, right?”

“Yes, they are crazy,” answered Van’er, taking the pike and stepping back into place to wait for the next wave of attack. “How late is it?”

“It’s almost noon.” Cat’s Paw sighed. Taking advantage of the Hunter overseer’s lack of attention, he took on both sides, “What’s with Jop and the Rodney Brothers?”

“Don’t look for them. Do you want to be killed by the wolves?” Van’er snapped. “They were assigned to the other walls; they are probably in the third or the fourth group. How were you able to change into group one?”

“I belonged to the replacement team,” Cat’s paw laughingly answered, “Whenever there is a need I will come and help. In the last wave, an uncle was wounded and now it’s my turn -“

“Make ready -!” sounded the Hunter overseer’s voice, interrupting Cat Paw’s words.

When looking down the wall, a dozen of quickly approaching demonic beasts could be seen, they were already so close that he could discern the various kinds of demonic beasts. This wave only had two wolves. The others were wild boars, a species of fox and a species of bear, which were no big threat to the wall.

“Pierce!” Nevertheless, he still obeyed the instructor’s orders, carrying out a unified pike attack. Sure enough, this time, his pike thrust only hit the air. But when he recovered his pike, Van’er saw that the two wolves were already shot down by a group of other hunters. Since this wave of demonic beasts was slower, the hunter team had squeezed between the strike team, and shot as they pleased.

They had been undergoing this cycle of fixed action already from dawn until the present. When the first horn was sounded, most people were still asleep. Van’er yawned. This time, the attack of

the demonic beasts was more intense than ever before. Usually they had to maintain this kind of battle for only one or two waves, but today, the demonic beasts were piling up at the base of the wall. They had already been replaced by the second militia team halfway so that they could eat something, rest for a short moment, and then return to the wall.

But unexpectedly, Van'er found himself much calmer than he had previos thought he would b, so when he heard that the gun team had to step back, he let them through, just as rehearsed in the previous weekdays. At first, they seemed like strange rules and regulations, but now they came in handy and were incredibly effective.

The others looked almost the same as Van'er. They all firmly grasped their pikes and had a serious look on their face, but some of them looked very nervous. However, everyone stood still with a straight body, and no one stepped a step back.

However, Van'er knew that the biggest push to the morale hadn't come from the daily training, instead, it came from His Highness. At the moment after the firearms team shot, Van'er secretly glanced at the middle of the castle wall – it was the position where His Highness stood, overlooking the battle.

Shortly after the horn sounded for the first time, His Highness had stepped onto the top of the city wall. Since then, he had stood on the wall, continually holding the defense line without any rest. Even when it was time to eat, he didn't step down. Instead, His Highness remained on top of the wall and sent his chief knight to personally get the breakfast.

When Van'er recalled the behavior of the last lord, he remembered that the lord had withdrawn by boat as quickly as possible at the beginning of the Months of the Demons. The lord was followed by the other nobility, and then by the whole civilian population. As long as they had some silver royals they would flee by boat, but if they had no money, they could only use their own feet to flee to Longsong Stronghold. Thinking back at this, Van'er felt completely refreshed.

Yes, the army from the Lord of Longsong Stronghold and the prince's Border Town militia team was completely different. The former group completely relied on their armor and weapons, and often tyrannized the area within the new and old districts, even suppressing and blackmailing foreign businessmen. But in Van'er's view, apart from the captain from the second militia team, there was no difference between rogues and them. Led by His Royal Highness, the militia was such a powerful team that they weren't even afraid of blocking the demonic beasts outside of Border Town, making it impossible for them to advance. In the past, only Longsong Stronghold was able to do this.

Just look at Fish Balls, he was a former gangster in the old district. He was often the object of ridicule, but after joining the militia team and picking up the pike, he became a role model as a good citizen. There was also Fermi; his head was too big and he was a little slow, so he was often beaten up laughed at by the people of the old district. But now, when fighting with a pike, not only did he become extremely fast and ruthless, but also more skilled than most people. Every time when the others had already finished their training, he would still thrust out a hundred slashes, because His Highness had once said, "If the inflexible bird wants to overtake the more nimble ones, it has to catch up with their pace

and then do even more.”

In the beginning, it was obviously only for the second egg, but now the soldiers were glad that they had joined the militia. Every day there was subtle changes in everyone, and every day they could train harder than yesterday. Van’er thought that he wasn’t the only one who felt this way. Rather, he thought everyone would feel like this. He did not know how to describe his feelings. Perhaps it was best described by the words often used by His Highness – they were a team like never seen before.

“Woo – woo -” suddenly, two short horn blows could be heard. This was the early warning system for an approaching mixed species. So, Van’er looked into the distance and discovered a mixed species with wings and a lion’s head, which was very similar to the beast that broke through the last time. Today this is our second meeting, he thought, but this time, it isn’t the same as last time. In addition to the gun team, we also have help from other forces.

When he turned his head to the side and looked towards the middle of the wall, he could see a little girl with blond hair floating beside the Prince.

Chapter 88 - Winter Twilight (Part 2)

“Don’t be so hasty, now isn’t the time to act,” said Roland. He could only sigh when looking at Lightning who was eagerly flying around.

God only knows why she is so interested in fighting against that demonic beast. It’s obvious that she isn’t the fighting type. But, compared with ordinary people this little girl doesn’t even show the least bit of fear.

“Just follow the same pattern we used when dealing with the last one, don’t try to be brave, you’re just a lure so that it will focus its attention onto you. Always maintain a high degree of awareness! Even though it cannot fly, when it jumps up, it’s still a very serious threat!”

“I already know about that,” Lightning spoke with a voice full of confidence, “It isn’t my first fight with something like this. Rest assured, I already know my limit. This time, it won’t even be able to touch my clothes.”

During their talk, the mixed species had come even closer to the wall. It had already crossed the barriers, and leaped in the direction of the unguarded area, trying to climb the wall. But this time, it was ignored by the militia members. They just kept defending their own sector, always waiting for the Hunter Captain’s next stab command.

“Then, we begin the special operations mission against this

mixed species!” shouted Roland.

Hearing this, Lightning who was already flying out stopped for a moment and looked back to Roland.

“What’s up?”

“That phrase of your’s...” Lightning thought it through once more, then shook her head, “It seemed slightly strange. Well forget it, I’m off.”

Seeing the little girl’s small figure flying quickly away, Roland turned towards Anna and Nightingale and asked embarrassed, “Did you also thought that it was strange?”

“Well,” they both nodded.

All right... it seems even in this place these two lines were strange, “You both can go now as well. Be careful!”

“Your Highness, take care,” Nightingale bowed to Roland, then she took Anna’s hand and pulled her off into the fog.

Roland put his arms behind his back, standing straight while facing the wind, trying to imitate how a BOSS would look like. He knew that many soldiers, when they had the time to catch their breath, would secretly glance at him. Because of this, even though his feet were already numb, he stood stoically at the highest point of the wall, clearly visible to everyone – demonstrating that the

Prince was always on their side. Since he couldn't put himself into combat, this way he could still serve to inspire them.

This time, the intensity of the demonic beast attacks had exceeded all attacks previous. According to Iron Axe, during last year's Month of Demons, there would always only appear one or two mixed species. But this year, there were already four attacks of them on Border Town. The duration of these attacks was also unusually long, even now, groups of twelve or even larger would emerge from the forest, always continuing to dash towards the city wall.

Fortunately, the flintlock production has increased in the last month, and I'm now able to send out a team of one hundred armed with flintlocks. Without them, I would have never been able to guarantee such a high killing speed. If we had to use crossbows, I'm afraid killing all of them would have been very difficult.

In the long run, the advantage of guns, which needed less physical exertion, will become even more apparent.

Of course, the large consumption of gunpowder was enough to give Roland a headache, he had already ordered more than twenty packs of explosives from the warehouse, which tore a huge hole in his reserves, so he was already thinking about rationing gunpowder.

At the same moment, Lightning was already flying around the mixed species's head. She fished a stone from her pocket and threw it at the beast's head. The stone accurately hit the target's head, startling it so that it jumped forcefully back, only to discover that

the attack actually come from the sky.

To provoke it further, Lightning flew always at a low altitude and directly in front of its head, slowly luring it towards the town center. Although the mixed species certainly had the ability to think, but seeing this annoying little girl flying around in front of it, it didn't feel any threat. So it immediately pounced up, opened its wings, and in a few jumps it quickly crossed more than a hundred meters. Lightning seeing it prepare for a jump, immediately flew a bit higher and turned around, always keeping a few cottages and a street between herself and the beast.

In this way, after seven or eight turns around, she was finally able to lure it to the town center, which was the ambush location on which Nightingale and she had previously agreed on. As a former lion, its sense of smell was naturally very sensitive, it should even be able to discover Nightingale even when she was in her world of fog. Because of this problem, they had to pull the demonic beast's attention away from them, before Nightingale and Anna could start their surprise attack.

For this kind of job, Lightning was perfectly suited. She was able to enrage the mixed species so much, that it jumped around like a maniac, with an opened wide mouth, always trying to get at this annoying fly. But Lightning who didn't have to bear any weight, was always a small distance away from it, always flying up and down teasingly, making each jump fruitless.

At the same time and from another direction Nightingale also arrived at the town square – compared to Lightning, in her world of the fog she could ignore all houses and fences, always moving in

a straight line towards her goal. Since Anna's flame was only able to cover up to ten steps (5 meters), she had to get close to the mixed species, so she closed on it from behind, hoping to not be discovered.

When they had to face the mixed species for the first time, this part was very troublesome. However, now it was already their second run against this kind of mixed species and Nightingale had already gotten fully familiar with Anna's attack. So when they still were thirty feet away from the beast, she raised her speed to the limit, covering the distance in an instant, as if it was in only a single step. When Anna was able to see again, she discovered that the mixed species' tail was already directly in front of her face.

“Attack, now,” cried, Nightingale.

Around Anna, the black and white world swapped away like a wave. Within the blink of an eye, she was back to the familiar towns square. Directly releasing her green flame from the tip of her finger and expanding it into a great fire cage, covering the whole demonic beast.

Facing this flame, Nightingale had to hurriedly retreat, even only feeling the heat wave, was already enough to make her feel like she was burning.

Enclosed by the cage of fire, which was even able to melt steel, the mixed species did not have any time to struggle, it instantly turned into a ball of flame and crushingly fell to the ground.

“It seems they were already able to solve the problem,” Wendy informed him when she discovered the green flame in the distance. In the absence of Nightingale, it was her turn to protect Roland, “It seems like I won’t get any part in the play...”

“If possible, I would like it if it could stay this way,” Roland answered, still maintaining his straight stance, pretending like he was riding along an easy road. Having said that, he still knew, that without the help of the witches defending the town, the jumping mixed species would have thrown the militia once more into chaos.

But today, even Nana had come to the walls, giving fast treatment to the injured soldiers. Her father was always at her side, protecting her. Today was the first time that Roland publicized the power of the witches in front of all the militiamen, and he was very pleased. Within the ranks, the love for their angel Nana rose to new highs, but when Anna and Nightingale killed the mixed species together, the crowd also began to cheer loudly.

Of course, he clearly knew that not everyone wouldn’t mind them, such a situation like with the militia was very rare. But when they were fully accepted by the militia, he would still try to get them accepted by the whole town.

Suddenly, the sound of gunfire began to taper off, and Roland noticed that the demonic beasts began to evacuate the wall. Are they finally retreating? He couldn’t believe his eyes. But just at this moment, a beam of light broke through the thick clouds, covering the ground, followed by a second, then a third... Soon, tens of thousands ray of lights broke through the holes within the clouds.

Then all the light beams merged into one, becoming dazzling and unable to look at. The earth had suddenly brightened up.

“The day when the sun rises again is the end of all evil.”

There was a short moment of stillness on the wall, but then, a wave of cheering swept across the wall, towards the direction of Border Town. Gradually, the townspeople came out of the houses and also started to cheer. Welcoming the long missed sunshine, celebrating their surviving of the winter, or in order to thank the Prince. In the end, all the cheering merged into a flood, resounding throughout the entire Border Town!

3rd Saga - War is Everywhere

Chapter 89 - Victory Celebration (Part 1)

This year's winter was completely different than the previous year's. In the previous years, when the Months of Demons ended, Border Town's residents had to stay for one more month within Longsong Stronghold's slums. They waited until the snow had completely melted, only then would they head back home.

Back at the town, they always saw a complete mess. After a few months, some of the houses, which no one was taking care, had already become dilapidated. Some of the less sturdy huts had been overwhelmed by heavy snow and some of the townspeople's houses had been used by the demonic beast's as hiding place.

Everything was broken and in disorder. For example, the cupboards and the tables were full of bite-marks and the remains of their meals still lay within the corners. Obviously, these houses had been used as shelter from the snow and as their lair.

They often had to spend a week repairing the houses. Replacing all the moldy furniture, cleaning out the lingering smell of rot and so on. This was the procedure to which the residents were already accustomed to. But this year, it could even be said that Border Town seemed completely new, the snow was quickly swept away, and the prince provided to each family home's door a multi-colored banner. From afar, the previously monotonous and dilapidated town had become colorful. When the colors mixed together, it looked like a sea of flowers.

The castle also spread the news, that on the first day after the Months of Demons, his royal highness would hold a grand

celebration ball in the town square! Everyone was invited, and if that wasn't enough, no one had to pay a coin and would also be given free food!

What is a ball? It is a social occasion that only the upper nobility was allowed to attend. The townspeople only knew of them from the stories of the influential, experienced and knowledgeable merchants. Yet, even then, they were never allowed to attend. If what the merchants had been telling them was right, then, even with all their money, it still wouldn't be enough to receive an invitation. But now, His Highness would allow anyone to attend?

“Your Highness. You wouldn't do that, right?” Carter asked disapprovingly, “There will be neither a band nor will there be any lead dancers! So, who will control the rhythm of the ball? Besides, in this kind of remote place, even the nobles aren't necessarily able to dance, so citizens will only mess everything up.”

During Carter's time in Graycastle, he had only ever attended one ball. It had been hosted by a marquis to celebrate the birthday of his daughter. The music played was graceful string music mixed together with passionate drum beats, while the dancing contained many rotations and tapings. But if the instruments were played individually, the ladies would dance to the melodious string music, while the men displayed afterwards a fast and powerful dance, in rhythm with the sound of the drums. During breaks, attendants would shuffle through the crowd and hand out drinks and snacks. Up till the last song, the men still had time to find and invite their favorite woman to a dance, and if they were lucky, they would not only be rewarded with a dance, but also with some sort of romantic interaction.

Carter sighed, although he was still too young to invite his favorite girl, he could still remember the aftertaste of that elegant and romantic atmosphere. The nobilities are trained daily in maintaining their elegant demeanor, can the villagers who had to instead fight with the demonic beast daily compare with them? God, he could not imagine such a scene within Border Town.

“Lead dancer? Yes, well,” Roland had commanded the militia to remove the stone sculptures and the gallows from the town’s square, “Iron Axe and the militia member will take over that part.”

“That sandman?” Carter was stunned. As the captain of the Hunter Team, and with his performance during the Months of demons, Iron Axe had finally gained the recognition of the Chief knight. Even his alien appearance wasn’t mentioned any longer, however, the other one was still from the Moji Tribe, how could he know the etiquette of the Kingdom of Graycastle?!

Yet Roland only mysteriously smiled and said: “Because I’m the one who is organizing the ball, it won’t be the usual kind, you will understand it when you see it.

He didn’t have much preparation work to do, his biggest job was to remove the obstructions placed in the town square, and instead to put a pile of wood at the center. In addition, they had built tables out of stone, used to carry the barbecued food. Yes, this was the plan Roland had come up with – a combination of campfire with a wild barbecue.

Roland had long thought about the problem, how to increase the people’s sense of belonging to Border Town. After a long life

working under their previous lord, the concept of status and nationality was set too deep within these rural and illiterate villagers. Only their property and the lives of their family were of their concern. The more backward the people were, the more short-sighted they would become, this was a law for the development of civilization, "Civilization can only be as big as the greatest ideas of it's people," Roland thought deeply.

But this does not mean that lifting their spirits could be ignored, and this victory celebration was one of the methods he had figured out to transform their thinking.

In fact, he found it hard to understand that there was no general celebration after the end of the Months of Demons. Facing the invasion from the demonic beasts once in a year was just like a natural disaster. To overcome such evil was naturally worthy of remembering.

So he had decided to name the first day after the end of the Months of Demons as "Victory Day". So that within all of the territory belonging to him, this day had now become a public holiday, on which many kinds of celebrations were held. As long as he was able to do it for three to four years, this kind of celebration would become a tradition and would even later carry on without Roland. And with time the people would gradually feel that their own and other people under the governance of the Lord was indeed differently.

Even so, it wasn't noon, yet the square was still full of people. The members of the militia were lined around the pile of wood so that no other could come near it.

It seemed that the free distribution of food was quite attractive, I think that at least half of the town's inhabitants had come, Roland thought. In the end, more than one thousand people stood side by side, filling up the complete square beside the woodpile, there was no place for any other activities. He even discovered that some children had climbed up on the roof of the surrounding buildings so that they had a free look of everything.

Since it was their first time with this celebration, there were still some shortcomings. Roland thought that it was now the right time to enter the stage and to hold his speech.

This was now his second public speech he had held on this square, thanks to this, his attitude was much calmer than the last time.

“My people, good afternoon. I'm the fourth Prince of Graycastle, Roland Wimbledon.” He still used the same introduction as last time, but today its effect was completely differently than it was the last time. His voice hadn't fallen yet, but the crowd already cheered, “Long live the Prince, His Royal Highness!” “Long live His Highness!”

Roland suddenly felt a kind of warmth spreading through his chest, this time, he hadn't arranged for any propaganda from his own people. So when he heard the spontaneous cheers from his own militia and the townspeople, he felt a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction in his heart.

When their voices finally calmed down a little, he continued, “The Months of the Demons is finally over! Thanks to the militia’s heroic struggle, the demonic beasts weren’t able to cross the wall one step. This year Border Town had only to pay a very small price to fight off the demonic beasts. This proves that, as long as we unite, even if we don’t rely on the power of Longsong Stronghold, we can still get a foothold here! They wanted to threaten our town with food, the fear of hunger and cold, trying to force us to yield. But today’s victory told them, that all this was futile! “

“Right, I do not want to go back to that place anymore!”

“With His Royal Highness, we don’t need to fear a day of hunger during the winter!”

“At last they cannot blackmail us any longer, His Royal Highness is too kind!”

“Let us celebrate this splendid and glorious triumph together,” Roland shouted, taking advantage of the rising emotions within the crowd.

“It is a day to be remembered, and I declare that from now on the first day after the end of the Months of the Demons will be known as the ‘Victory Day’! The celebration today is precisely for this purpose! My people, enjoy this day to the fullest! Now, let the dance begin!”

With this a torch was thrown into the pile of firewood, the flames jumped up, instantly setting the whole atmosphere on

aflame.

Chapter 90 - Victory Celebration (Part 2)

Six marinated cattle were transported next to the bonfire by carts – if they weren't escorted by the militia, Roland suspected that on its way through the crowd, the whole cattle would have already been carved up by the masses.

This was all of the food reserves the castle had left within the basement. So they wouldn't have any meat to eat until the arrival of the next merchant ship. Thinking of this, Roland's heart began to ache. In order to run this celebration, he had even used up all of the reserves he had.

The master chefs brought over from Graycastle were only responsible for wiping the meat and controlling the heat. In the end, the task of barbecuing was handed over to six people from the militia team. An iron bar was inserted into the cattle's body through its mouth and then placed in front of the fire on a brick station. The flames were wildly burning so that even separated by two to three meters, the heat waves were still clearly felt. Soon the whole cow's skin issued a sizzling sound, oil began to emerge out of its pores, emitting a seductive scent.

Of course, the barbecue couldn't be the only attraction, so on Roland's signal, Iron Axe together with a team of militia entered the stage.

Since those gorgeous and complex court dance didn't apply to such an occasion, and there wasn't much time for training; they couldn't even remember all the essentials steps, let alone show such a beautiful and complex dance. To ensure that it was an easy

to understand dance which was still enjoyable, the dance of the sand people was clearly more in line with the interests of the civilians.

The dance started with Iron Axe and the others placing both of their hands on their hips, always putting the right arm through the partner's left arm, forming a two rings around the bonfire. They were accompanied by the sounds of horns and began to move clockwise, with each step, they would throw the other foot to kick forward while shouting "Ha!

"Is this the lead dance you talked about?" Carter asked startled. "Can you even call this a dance?"

"Of course, it is very easy to remember, the militia had only needed to practice half an hour last night to master the pace," Roland answered laughingly. "Do you also want to try?"

Carter shook his head and refused the offer. He just felt as if something in his heart would soon break out with a bang – don't, she was just a girl with an appearance which made men's hearts beat faster. Don't, she is just a sad memory from my youth.

The other militia members were clapping with their hands in the pace of the all the dancer's footsteps, accompanying each round with faster applause. The extremely fast rhythm moved the masses, they one after another reached out with their own hands to clap in accordance. As the applause got faster and faster, Iron Axe and his teams dancing speed also became faster and faster. Soon the ring began to show signs of coming apart. It didn't take long until one of the dancers accidentally fell, taking more of the

dancers with him. Seeing this the crowd became shocked, but the militia did not stop the applause, instead it got wilder and changed into a storm.

Iron Axe propped himself by a militia member, stopping his fall and then he turned to the crowd and shouted: “Did everyone understand it? Who would like to try it themselves? Until you fall just like us! If you join the dance, you can afterwards dive into the sweet and delicious honey barbecue, the longer you dance, the more meat you get!”

If the nobility or the rich families were to invite them, the normal townspeople would never have been involved – subconsciously, giving them the feeling that they were superior compared to themselves. It was also common for the nobility to go back on their promises. But when they saw the militia members, which came from the usual crowd of civilians now beckoning them to dance with them, they were unable to hold themselves back.

After the first round of people joined, they were soon followed by a second and then a third round. So soon, a new dance started, but this time most of the dancers came from the masses. Although this was a very simple interaction, it still made them very happy, in addition with the reward of the honey barbecue in their sight, the participants tried their hardest to show the best possible performance.

This was exactly the scene Roland wanted to see.

In addition to the barbecue, there were also bread, fish-cakes, and ale that was distributed to the masses. The celebration was

planned to continue until evening, but Roland didn't plan to stay until then. He arranged for Carter to be in charge of the town square's safety, and the assistant minister was responsible for the closing speech, then he left.

He instead attended a private party at the castle's back garden.

When the evening came, the backyard was still brightly lit.

Just like in the town's square, they had also started a bonfire. The difference was that they used chicken for the barbeque which were cut into pieces. The seasoning and oil were of their own configuration, completely imitating the atmosphere of a barbeque in the wild. This kind of novelty of self-service style was loved too much by the witches, that they could never part with it. Of course, for Roland's eyes, this was a rare spectacle – for example, Anna directly wrapped the chicken into her green flame after seasoning it, which soon gave off a delicious fragrance. Nightingale instead showed off her incredible knife work, one moment the knives were hidden and a second later the chicken was hung upside down, completely peeled and with all of its bones fell down.

And of course, for the wine, it came from Willow Town and was much more suitable for the tastes of women than ale. Actually, Roland wanted to say that minors were prohibited from drinking, yet Lightning had already emptied half a bottle by herself and since she was floating in the air, it would be difficult to persuade her, Roland thought.

After around one hour within the barbecue, Roland was slightly tipsy. He leaned against a chair and watched the group of happy

laughing girls. Seeing this, Roland felt very pleased. This is the perfect life for a prince, he thought, and also for the witches. With their extraordinary abilities and appearance, they shouldn't be the object of hunting. If they were born in my previous life, I'm afraid they would have become the dazzling focus of many people. But now, here in my territory, they can live a normal life.

At this moment, Lightning suddenly fell down, directly landing on Roland's lap, and even before he had the possibility to react, she already had planted a kiss on his cheek.

Although this action was done very quickly, it was still captured by many witches.

When Lightning grinningly flew upwards again, she could see that Anna, Nightingale, and Wendy looked very surprised, so she waved her hand explained: "According to the rules of the Fjords when they hold a banquet to celebrate a victory, the woman can take the initiative to kiss the leader. Dad would let me kiss him every time. Isn't this also a habit in Graycastle?"

"Of course not," Roland instantly woke up from his half-drunken state, "uh... cough cough, Lightning you're drunk, quickly go back to the castle and sleep!"

"How can that be," Lightning protested, "When I was sailing, I had many drinking battles with the crew and I never lost."

Roland, recognizing that she would not follow the order, turned to Wendy, who nodded and then used her power to kindly blow

Lightning to the earth. When Lightning was close to landing, Wendy took two steps forward, approaching the girl and catching her within his arms. Disregarding of Lightings shouting and struggling, she walked in a straight line towards the castle.

“Don’t worry about her, she just drunk too much. Please continue to celebrate, soon the dessert will be delivered.” Roland suddenly felt that the atmosphere had turned a little strange, especially when he looked into Anna’s eyes, he felt a chill rising up from his feet. The only one who was completely unaffected by what happened was Nana, she was still concentrating on eating her chicken wings, like nothing had happened in general.

After the bonfire was gradually extinguished, Roland requested Nightingale to escort Nana home. Then he went to the well and washed his face with cold water, already ready to go to bed. Roland didn’t take the former episode to heart, in his view, Lightning was still a minor child.

But when he arrived at the third floor, his heart suddenly begun to race.

He saw Anna who was leaning against his door.

Chapter 91 - Heart Prison

The corridor was shed by the moonlight which fell through the windows, yet only half of Anna's face was visible. Her eyes reflected the faint blue light, looking like two stars within the dark. Anna leaned against the door, with most of her body hidden in the shadows, but her outline was still visible – good nutrition had completely changed her previous thin and skinny body, turning it into the body of an adult woman. Her body was just perfect, containing the right curves of her age but also the unique charm of youth.

Roland put on a calm face, stepped slowly forward until he was discovered by Anna. Finally, he stood in front of her and they looked each other into the eyes.

“It was just an accident, I didn't know she would do – ” Roland began.

“I know.”

“The other is still a minor, so I didn't care –”

“This, I also understood.”

Anna reacted completely differently than Roland had expected. It didn't seem like Anna was at odds with him, he couldn't detect any trace of displeasure on her face, there was only a serious look. There weren't any waves within her lake-like blue eyes, Roland realized that she was still a straightforward woman, she didn't like

any camouflage and didn't need to hide anything. Sure enough, she took the initiative, and said: "I cannot be like Lightning, in front of so many people I don't dare to show such... bold behavior, so I had to wait for you here."

After this sentence, her cheeks gained a touch of blush, but even so, she didn't shrink back and her eyes were still focused straight on Roland's. Her look could even be said to be incomparably serious.

For two beats Roland's heart set out, he wanted to say something, but he felt that, at the moment, everything he could say would be meaningless. She may mind the action of Lightning, but grieving or complaining wasn't her way of acting, she would simply express her own feelings.

Upright and hard-working children shouldn't be rejected, he thought. So Roland bent down, coming close to Anna's cheek, even feeling her breath on his face, like a spring breath fiddling his heartstrings. Within the quiet environment they could clearly hear each other's nervous breathing, then, soft lips slightly touched Roland's cheeks.

"Good night, Your Highness," Anna whispered.

Wendy set on the bed looking at some books.

For her, moments like this where she had leisure time were very

rare. During her time in the Witch Cooperation Association, she also would have never thought about leading such a life.

It wasn't long since she started staying within the town, but she had already developed the habit to: Before going to sleep she would clean her body. And then she would put on a silk gown, which wasn't fastened around the waist nor wasn't buttoned up. Sit cross-legged in the bed, with a soft pillow between her back and the wall, read books she had borrowed from His Highness.

It had taken her a lot of time until she got Lightning to rest, so afterward she did not intend to return to the back garden to continue the celebration, and instead, she washed herself and went to bed.

At the moment she was reading a history book about the origin of the Church.

Although she grew up in a monastery, yet this was a theme that she didn't know much about. The nuns had always warned them to obey the teaching of God, but they never mentioned God's name – during her childhood this discrepancy had always puzzled her. Everything had a name, so why of all the things does the noblest God not have one?

What was recorded within the books she had read and the rumors she had later heard told of basically the same thing. At the beginning of the history of the mainland, there were three major religions, which thought of each other as heretics, believing that their gods were the only ones. This battle of faith lasted for nearly a hundred years, and in the end, the Church took the final victory.

They declared that the other Gods had been destroyed, and that calling God with any other name was forbidden, this was the word of God itself.

The following pages described the glory and immortality of the church, including the building of the Old Holy City and the New Holy City, and their victory over the evil witches. To Wendy this all seemed very strange.

She had also borrowed the books, “The History of the Kingdom of Graycastle” and “A brief History of the Mainland” from Roland. The first one almost unequivocally recorded the Kingdom’s establishment, development and major events. Such as the name of each king and the marital status and whereabouts of their children. The family with all their branches were described in such details, that it nearly looked like a detailed genealogy.

“The brief History of the Mainland” focused more on the evolution of the four kingdoms, their alternations in handling their powers and the inner and outer political struggles. However, they still put very much importance into the ruling families.

Yet, within the History book about the Church, there wasn’t mentioned any of the Popes’ names, or it could be said that it was the same thing they had done with God’s name. They just replaced their former names with the title Pope. So, throughout the whole book, it just looked like there was only one Pope during all of the hundreds of years of history. This wasn’t consistent with common sense, instead of calling it a record, it would be better to say it was a deliberate delusion.

At this moment, Nightingale suddenly appeared within Wendy's room. When Wendy discovered her, she put down her book and looked at the other one with interest: "It's already so late, and you're only now free to talk to me?"

Nightingale rubbed her tensed neck, and went to the bedside to sit down, "I just finished my job of bringing Nana home, how did you fare with Lightning?"

"On the way she was nonstop talking about her father, yet when she hit the bed, she immediately fell asleep, I didn't even need to read some stories to her." Wendy shrugged. "She always acts like she is already a big girl, but in truth, she is still a little child."

"In your eyes, everyone is still a child," said the Nightingale teasingly and took the book Wendy had previously in her hand. "His Royal Highness had said that you shouldn't read at night, especially that you shouldn't read when sitting in bed. The lighting isn't good enough and will hurt your eyes."

"Yes, your Royal Highness did say that."

The two of them talked for a long time. They talked about the time when they traveled together from Silver City to the Impassable Mountain Range, what happened when they heard about a soon-to-be-killed witches, how they survived the Months of Demons. Nightingale had a lot to say, so much so that Wendy was only occasionally able to throw in one or two sentences. During the last five years, this two were so inseparable that they had developed a tacit understanding between each other. So the time passed slowly until finally the candles were about to

extinguish. Seeing this Wendy began to laugh and asked, “How is it? Can’t you sleep because of Lightning’s actions today?”

“What are you talking about...?”

“What else can it be,” Wendy smiled and shook her head. “Veronica, we are witches, you should know what that means.”

“...” Nightingale kept silent, and even after a long time she didn’t know what to say, “Well.”

This fate, there was no witch who could escape it. Wendy put away her smile, sighed and then said, “Roland Wimbledon is the kingdoms 4th Prince, and we have to do everything possible to ensure that he will take over the throne. Then, when he rules the kingdom, he will be able to present us sisters with a shelter against the Church.

But that would also mean that he has to become the King, and then there will come the time, where he has to marry a Duke’s daughter or the princess of another kingdom. Then, they will get children, maybe one or several. If it’s a boy, he will inherit the country, and if it’s a girl she will be married off to another noble family.”

Here, Wendy paused for a moment, giving Nightingale time to prepare since she had to say words, which no witch wanted to hear, “Veronica, we are witches, witches cannot give birth to children.”

“Even with the most optimistic outcome, where there is no difference between an ordinary people and us witches, where we can freely walk along every road through the kingdom even after the death of His Highness. With occasional cases of outstanding witches gaining the right to enter the upper ranks of society, maybe even get canonized as nobles. There will still always be the case that we witches will never be able to have any descendants. And without any descendants, we are unable to continue the family’s glory, so the nobles won’t even consider marrying any witch. So we will gain some things, but at the same time, an important part will be taken from us. ‘This is our fate,’ she whispered, “I wish I didn’t need to tell you this.”

“I see,” Nightingale whispered.

When Nightingale had finally left, Wendy didn’t feel so good. But she believed that Nightingale would still be able to overcome this setback, after all, she had already crossed so many difficulties, she surely will also be able to cross this threshold.

Of this, Wendy was convinced.

Chapter 92 - Army Rearrangement

“With this, our service period is over, right?” asked Cat’s Paw who was clearing the square of the burning debris of the bonfire, and then continued with a voice full of regret, “I really don’t want to go back to the mines and work in a hole. I have to say, I already miss the Months of Demons, a little.”

“Yeah, and I don’t want to deal with those stones again either,” Jop immediately agreed, “The most important thing is that the difference in salary is too much. When we were assigned to the artillery, we had meat every day and a salary of 15 silver royals each day.”

“Don’t say such foolish words,” said Van’er while holding a torch high to illuminate the surrounding “His Highness provided all this food to us so that no person would starve to death during the Months of Demons. You only need to remember what happened the previous two years, not even half of the people from the old district were able to survive! Did you already forget this? I’ll say it once more, it’s unlikely that the team will be dissolved, His Highness just put us into the artillery team and burned so much gunpowder to train us, do you think that was all without reason?”

“But the Month of Demons is over, so, why would His Highness still need the artillery?” asked Rodney while leaning on a broom.

That’s because the artillery isn’t meant for the demonic beasts, Van’er thought, but in the end he said out loud, “Soon we’ll know more, tomorrow we’ll hear the answer,” he yawned then waved his hand impatiently, “Okay enough, quickly clean everything up,

I'd like to go back to bed soon.”

The next morning, the teams were assembled and Van'er's previous statement was confirmed.

When everyone was there, Iron Axe went in front of the lined up team and said loudly: “You have completed the first stage of the task – which was to defend Border Town against the demonic beasts. After three months and six days of fighting, you all earned His Highness' recognition! Because of this, the militia will be promoted to His Highness' regular army, but in case you don't want to fight any longer, you just need to stand up and leave now. His Highness had said that everyone who leaves now, will get all of your outstanding payments, and additional payment of twenty-five silver royals as... “Iron Axe had to think for a moment, then he said,” right, retirement fee.”

From the three hundred militia members, no one moved, only the Cat's paw raised his hand and said: “Report.”

This was also one of the odds rules the Prince had introduced during the training, no one was allowed to whisper in private if they wanted to say something they had to shout.

Iron Axe nodded, “Speak.”

“What do you mean by being promoted to the regular army, do we become knights?”

Van'er couldn't stop himself from laughing, but he quickly set up a serious face again.

Becoming Knights? That would mean becoming part of the aristocracy, not only getting an estate and a squire, but also their own territory. By asking this question, he had really lost a lot of face for the artillery.

“No,” answered Iron Axe and began to patiently explain, obvious to him since he had also previously asked His Highness, “The regular army is a professional fighting force, only established for the protection of His Highness and his territory. In other words, when miners work in the mine, you will be training, when the farmers harvest their wheat, you will be training. And when the merchants sell their goods, you are still training. All the training is to win all the future battles, just like you did against the demonic beasts during the Months of Demons.”

“Then what is the difference between the regular army and the militia?” Asked Cat's Paw.

“More frequent training, stricter training methods, and a greater reward.”

“Report!” Hearing all this Rodney couldn't help himself and asked, “What does a greater reward mean?”

Van'er sighed, why was his group of young men so impetuous? But in all honesty, he would also like to know this answer.

“The regular army will get an officer-led structure, and soldiers who fulfilled their given task according to the previous plan during the battles will get the chance at a promotion, and soldiers who performed extraordinarily well,” said Iron Axe, “for example, could rise to my position.”

If this was what His Highness said... Van'er thought to himself, and this was the way they implement it, it would be better to not offend one's superior, right? He quietly looked around, it seemed that no one realized the general problem, instead, they still listened with keen interest and pleasure.

“Officers won't only get a higher payment, they will also get... their own territory.”

After the last word fell the crowd burst into an uproar, Van'er was also no exception, he even had doubts if he heard everything right. If they could get their own territory, then, would there be any difference between them and the knights?

“But remember that once you choose to become a member of the regular army, the system you will follow then will be completely different from the system you are used from the militia. Such as in the case you aren't able to complete the given task, escape, start a rebellion, or any other violation of the disciplinary codex will be severely punished. This isn't like the previous punishment of not getting an additional egg to eat, instead it includes extra labor, imprisonment and even hanging. Also, every previously awarded position can be taken back.” Iron Axe paused for a moment, “Now is your time to quit.”

The crowd fell into silence, and also Iron Axe tensed up, but still, no one moved. He couldn't help himself as he began to grin: "Well, then from today on, you all are placed directly under His Royal Highness Roland Wimbledon's orders!"

Van'er himself felt incredible, if he had heard these terrible punishments three months ago, he would have slipped away long ago. What is the use of promotion, what is the use of owning one's own territory, if you aren't able to save your own life? But now, he almost did not hesitate to choose the fixed position, compared with returning to the North Slope Mine to collect gravel, or to stay in the old district only able to wander idly around, it was clear which was much more to his interest.

"Your perception is pretty good, what's your name?"

"Mr. Van'er, I hope you continue to do well."

His Royal Highness encouraged him to train hard and he also reaffirmed his idea that he belonged to the militia and now Van'er would continue to fight for His Royal Highness as a member of the regular army.

Iron Axe quickly announced today's first training program: Field training.

At the beginning Van'er felt very disappointed, it was once more running for training. Even during the Months of Demons if the

weather was good enough they always had to run. After breakfast, they checked the weather conditions and then they had to run two laps around the town unless there were large snowflakes falling from the sky, then they would abort running training. According to the saying of His Highness, this exercise was good for the muscles and allowed their bones to thaw so while defending the city walls their movements wouldn't become stiff and unable to use the pike.

But when the soldiers ran out of Border Town, Van'er immediately felt the difference between this new and the old training program.

At this point, the snow on the field was still far from melting, after three months of uninterrupted snowing, the snow reached up to their knees. Calling it running wasn't the right word, instead, it was better to call it crawling through the snow. The team suddenly broke into many small groups, after each step they needed a lot of strength to take another step.

There was no doubt that this special training of struggling through the snow was certainly an idea of His Highness. Van'er had already figured out the goal of His Royal Highness. At this moment, any protest would become invalid, they were only able to go through with this training until the end.

During the whole morning, they had to struggle through the snow. So when the team returned to the town, Van'er was satisfied that he couldn't feel his own legs any longer.

The snow which got into their boots had already turned into

water, even standing in the sun, most people were still cold and trembling. The huge physical exertion exacerbated the chill, even Iron Axe felt unable to eat. He announced the dissolution of the team, and delayed the lunchtime for thirty minutes so that everyone could dry their boots and replace their pants.

So everyone was very pleased when they later heard that the afternoon training was cancelled.

Of course, they didn't know that Lightning had supervised the whole field training – this was the little girl's daily training regime: Learning to precisely control her magic to fly with uniform velocity. When she later reported her gathered information to Roland, the latter nearly fell from his seat.

The total distance traveled throughout the morning was four kilometers.

Chapter 93 - Army Framework

A few days after the victory celebration, Roland finally undertook the great farming project.

A constant dripping sound could be heard from the direction of the windows when he was sitting in his office, it sounded as if it was raining non-stop. It was the sound of the melting snow.

When he visited the countryside for New Year's, he laid in front of the window most of the time, watching the long ice prisms which hung under the roof turn transparent and then into droplets, which then fell down. At the moment he hadn't had the time for such leisure. However, writing down plans for the future while simultaneously listening to the voice of earth's recovery was also very pleasurable.

According to the information gathered from the previous years, the snow would need about one week's time to melt, but the road between the Border Town and Longsong Stronghold would at least need one month until it was usable again. It took so much time after the snow melted since the road was built out of mud and also didn't have a drainage system.

Roland could already imagine it. If he wanted to defeat Longsong Stronghold, the first thing he needed to do, was to build a road between the two cities which was usable by carriages even during heavy rains.

But now the problem with the highest priority was still the issue

of the army's reconstruction. Without a reliable and mighty army, it would be impossible to defeat the forces of the Longsong Stronghold with his outnumbered troops. Transferring the militia into the regular army was only the first step. The specific preparation of establishing the new rules, discipline, reward and punishment system turned out to be a big headache.

Although as a child he had played land battle chess, however, he had already long forgotten all the previous teachings. Roland, after some thought, simply decided to make up his own plans. Anyway, as the creator of the new army, even if he implemented unreasonable things, no one would discover it anyway.

So Border Towns' first compilation for the new army was soon prepared: according to the Army, division, platoon, team, squad, five people for a squad (taking into account that a cannon needed at least five people to operate), ten squads for a team, ten teams for a platoon. As for the number of platoons within a division, he decided to consider it later. In view of the overall battle prowess of the armies during this era, as long as he sent out two or three platoons of soldiers, it should be enough to defeat the vast majority of opponents on the battlefield.

When he decided on the basics for the army framework, Roland took a deep breath.

The rules and regulations that came next were much simpler, in addition to always wearing their uniform, they had to obey the commanding officer, never desert, never betray a comrade and so on. Roland's first rule was to prohibit plundering and harassing.

The problems caused by plundering were numerous, and the negative impact it had on the local inhabitants was so great, that they would need years to recover, if ever. This was also the reason why he had insisted on only using civilians as the members of the military.

When the aristocracy responded to the call for battle of their Lords, the main reason for their obeying wasn't to defeat the enemy, instead, it was for the looting afterwards. Or in other words, the main reason they followed the call of war, was to plunder the wealth and territory of an enemy, of course, this included also the innocent civilians within that territory.

As for the mercenaries, not to mention bandits, even though they looked steady and fierce, but if you took a closer look, they were just a flag waving in the wind and at the same time robbery was also a major source of their income. So hoping for military discipline from these people was meaningless.

Only an army built up out of civilians wouldn't see other civilians as only lambs to be slaughtered. Of course, relying on discipline and moral restraint alone wasn't enough. After long days in the field, the heart of greed would enlarge with each continued victory. Therefore, the given rewards had to always keep up with the greed, only in this way could he prevent looting and other illegal behavior.

In order to make the reward grand enough, Roland decided to offer the greatest reward of all – receiving their own territory. As long as they achieved great merits during battle, they could get their own territory. Roland had many unclaimed territories, like

this, the land between Border Town and Longsong Stronghold could slowly be reclaimed.

Since more than 90% of all land belonged to members of the aristocracy, such a reward was absolutely very appealing. Once they had their own property, these people would be closely attached to his side, and in case there was someone who wanted to overthrow him, they would show the strongest possible resistance to protect their benefactor and with this, protect their own land as well.

After all, humankind wasn't driven by words and whips, but by their own benefits. Putting it another way, as long as he could continuously fulfill the basic interests of the people under his rule, there would be no one who could shake his dominance.

Unlike a traditional fief, Roland will grant them an area between a few acres and up to a dozen acres. The territory could be used to build their own residences, and they could purchase serfs or hire farmers to take care of their fields, but they weren't allowed to set up their own industry. In contrast, the rewarded territory for a knight is close to two thousand acres, an area equivalent to a small village. The above-mentioned industry income was used to provide the knight and his attendant's for their war necessities, for example, it was needed to purchase their own weapons, armors and horses.

Being awarded such a small area of land wasn't of much interest to the aristocracy and as such wouldn't encounter much resistance, but it would also weakened the feeling of independence for the people on the battlefield. In Roland's view, it was just like

paying a retirement pension, which would ensure that the soldiers had a stable income even after retirement.

At the same time, in order to strengthen the centralization of power, and to avoid that the thought that “servant’s servant is not my servant,” would occur, he would only grant them the ownership of the territory but no autonomy. In other words, the land was still under the jurisdiction of the laws, regulations, and systems in the Lord’s area. In a sense, they would become the foundation for the future generations of farmers.

After he had written down the concept for the reward system, Roland took a break and stretched his body. Then finally he could start thinking about a field within his own area of expertise – R&D weapons.

With the increasing speed of flintlock manufacturing, continuing to use spearman to protect the gunners seemed to be a waste of manpower, so the latter needed the ability to fight independently in melee combat.

There was a very easy solution to this problem, that was, adding a bayonet to the flintlock. Roland didn’t expect his own men to take the initiative and engage in close range combat, instead they should only have the ability to defend themselves in case the power of the gun wasn’t able to completely destroy the enemy’s courage and they started a desperate attack.

A weapon like a bayonet wasn’t so difficult to manufacture, describing it in easy to understand words, it was just a sharp cone, and in the case of further improving the killing effectiveness, he

could also add a blood groove into it. The key part was the connection between the bayonet and the gun, the first bayonet was a blade which was connected to a thin wooden pole, which could be directly put into the barrel of the gun. The advantage of this construction was that it was quite simple, the disadvantage was also very obvious, if the bayonet was used the gun was unable to fire, and in addition, if it was used to stab someone, it could happen that the bayonet would become stuck in the enemy's body.

So Roland intended to produce the improved second generation bayonet – the casing type bayonet. The bayonet had an iron casing added to the blade's handle. The inner casing diameter was slightly larger than the grooved barrel.

One only needed to weld a piece of iron with a hole on top of the barrel. After plugging the bayonet on top of the barrel and inserting a filling into the hole, it would become fixed. The blade had a triangular form, with three sharp blades, if pierced into the body it wouldn't fall off, and it would also leave a difficult to heal wound.

After the installation of the bayonet, the bayonet would be slightly longer than the barrel, and so also complicate the loading process, but compared to a folding bayonet, it was much simpler for mass production. As long as there was a sample, any blacksmith was able to reproduce it.

But to enable the bayonet to play an important part in a battle, it was important to train the soldiers in how to use it.

But Roland naturally didn't know anything about it. Fortunately,

he remembered that his Chief Knight had once boasted, that he was able to use any weapon. So he just had to find him and get him to teach the others how to fight with a [bayonet](#).

Chapter 94 - Destruction Doesn't Need A Reason

The artillery production was also advancing steadily , the second round of production for the cannons had already entered the drilling phase, while the third round was still at the material collection phase.

If he is lucky, Roland could have a gorgeous lineup of four 12-pounders after a month. There was no doubt of his superiority in terms of firepower. But the question now was how could he turn this advantage into a winning situation, and Roland was still striving for an answer to this.

Before he'd crossed over, he was just working as a mechanical dog, and just like for most of the other people in that world, his understanding of war had only come from history, movies and games. If it was just a battle with cold weapons, he could have handed over the command to Carter and Iron Axe. But this battle wasn't the same as those two had previously fought, there was no one who would be able to understand these new hot weapons better than himself.

That being the case, he could only gather the knowledge they had and build his own plans on that foundation in addition to his knowledge from a later era.

In order to ensure his victory, Roland let Lightning travel every day between Border Town and Longsong Stronghold. On one hand to observe the road's conditions, and on the other hand because he needed to accurately calculate the distance. Roland believed that

the victory in war was built on a foundation of previous gathered information and calculations. Whether it was a tactical development, or the deduction of each stage of a battle, receiving victory in a battle was inseparably linked to these two points.

Roland once more took the one-meter long iron pipes and the one hundred meter long hemp ropes he'd made for determining the firing range of his cannons. Then he went to the artillery testing area west of Border Town and measured with them a distance of one kilometer. Then he let Lightning fly this distance so that she would always do it in the same amount of time.

When she had skillfully remembered exactly how much magic to use, Roland began to measure the distance between the Longsong Stronghold and Border town. Using a sundial to measure the time that was needed for a round-trip, he had calculated the distance between the two places was around fifty-five kilometers.

Of course, this was the linear distance between two points. In fact, if traveling by land, you would need to take two big bends in order to avoid crossing over the foothill of the Impassable Mountain Range. So in the case that the Duke choose to attack by land, he would need at least three days to reach Border Town.

With Lightning as a Scout, Roland would be able to have always have a clear idea where the enemy was and what he had to do.

Within the range of two kilometers to the west of Border Town, he had inserted many signal flags to signal the distance, so if the enemy entered this area his artillery could quickly adjust the muzzle angle without the need of firing a test shot.

Now he began to worry what to do if the other party didn't start an attack.

At this moment, a knocking sound came from the door.

Nightingale, who had been lying all the time on the couch, chewing dried fish slices, vanished. Seeing this, Roland coughed twice, and said, "Come in."

The door opened and his assistant minister Barov stepped in, "Your Highness, a member of the aristocracy of Longsong Stronghold want to see you."

"Who?" asked Roland only to directly ask once again, "Did they send that ambassador again?"

"No, not the ambassador," Barov shook his head, "It is one of the nobles who left before the beginning of the Months of Demons, Baron Cornelius, who's came back now."

Roland had to think a moment until he remembered that indeed there were nobles living in Border Town that had escaped to the stronghold. But now they dare to come back? They immediately return when spring starts. Doesn't they respect the royal law? "Why does he want to see me?"

"During the construction of the wall, his house was demolished," said the assistant to the treasurer. "If you don't want to receive

him, I could send him out.”

Roland wanted to take him up on his offer, but then he changed his mind, “Let the Baron wait for me in the parlor.”

Maybe through him, Roland could put some pressure on Longsong Stronghold, at least this was something he would like to happen.

After dawdling for around half an hour, Roland leisurely entered the parlor. After arriving he saw a man with a very round belly impatiently waiting beside the long table. While the man restlessly walked up and down, the additional layers of meat on his face swayed in accordance with his steps. Seeing that His Highness had finally appeared, the Baron stopped his walking and reluctantly went through the royal greeting ceremony.

“Sit down,” Roland went to the table and placed himself in his seat. According to his usual habits, even if it wasn’t time for dinner, he would let his kitchen at least prepare a dessert, but today he did not even let them prepare tea.

“Your Highness, Prince,” murmured Cornelius, and started speaking even before he sat, “How could you let that stupid stonemason take my house apart? That was still a good house. From the parapet, the logs used for the roof beam column was also of the best quality. When I had it built, I had to spend more than one hundred... no, one hundred and fifty gold royals!” While speaking, he agitatedly waved with his hands.

One hundred and fifty, hearing this Roland had to use a lot of strength to suppress his laughter. If it was still the Prince from before, when looking through the old memories, maybe I really would have believed that. But now... “You mean the house located the furthest to the west?”

“Well,” said Cornelius while nodding, “It was the grand mansion, second only to Baron Simon’s.”

“It’s such a pity, that it was located too close to the wall, and had hindered the passage of my men,” Roland said , after stopping for a moment then he continued, “but the Town Hall had already decided on the compensation.

“How much...?”

Roland stretched out two fingers, “Twenty gold royals.”

“That’s too little! Your Royal Highness...” shouted Cornelius while spraying spittle everywhere. Eventually, he calmed down. Then he took out his handkerchief and wiped the sweat from his forehead. “Well, twenty, twenty gold royals, where should I go get the money?”

“Get?” Roland put on a puzzled look. “The money has already been paid to the owner of the house.”

“What? Wait, wait... I am the owner of that mansion!”

“It’s not you. It’s Blair, the captain of my second militia.”

“Who is that?” the Baron asked once more in a loud voice, “Your Highness, you are mistaken, I am the Master of the House!”

“But I didn’t see you during the winter,” Roland picked up his brow, “How then, can that house be yours?”

“Of course I wasn’t there; I went back to the Longsong Stronghold. Who would stay in this god forsaken place, this place is only able to be used as a feeding ground for the demonic beast?!”

“So you want to say you fled because you feared the demonic beasts. And you still have the face to call yourself a Lord?” asked Roland.

“I, uh...” the Baron was suddenly stunned and didn’t know how to reply.

“Guards,” Roland clapped his hands, and immediately two guards came into the parlor, holding Cornelius between them.

“We’re in the Palace Hallo, what do you mean with this!?”

“Very simple, you now have two choices,” Roland stood up from the seat, freezing Cornelius with his look, “First, you admit that you’ve wronged, that the house doesn’t belong to you. And then I can look at what happened just now as nothing more than a farce. Your second option is admitting that during the Months of

Demons, you betrayed your Lord, fleeing from the battle without the permission of your Lord, shamefully escaping to Longsong Stronghold. If you take this option, I will put you in prison for desertion, where you will wait for the day of your hanging. Which one do you choose?”

The sweat pouring from Cornelius’ forehead didn’t stop, he swallowed in fear, hesitated for a moment before he quivered: “Your Highness, I... I made a mistake, it was not my house.

“So this was all a misunderstanding,” Roland shrugged, and then said to the guards, “Send the Baron on his way.”

When Cornelius was nearly through the door, the Prince stopped him once more: “Right, when you take your ship back to the Longsong Stronghold can you please deliver a message for me? Tell those... ah, who have maybe the same misunderstanding as yourself, in case they don’t want to choose the second option, they don’t need to waste their time by coming to Border Town.

“Anything you want, Your Highness,” Cornelius said with a forced smile while leaving the room. But the moment he turned around, Roland could see how his counterpart was gnashing his teeth.

Like this, I ought to have created a big enough uproar within Longsong Stronghold, right? Roland thought.

Chapter 95 - Meeting

Damn, damn! What a bullshit prince, isn't he the one who was only thrown into this wilderness out of pity! Cornelius ferociously thought, but when he remembered the two guards with their hands at their swords who were walking behind him, he had to temporarily swallow his mouthful of resentments back into his stomach.

When he was finally out of the castle and saw the two guards leaving, the Baron felt relieved.

He pulled out an already wet handkerchief and wiped his forehead. He resolutely spit out a mouth full of spittle. While imagining the spit directly smashing into the Prince's face. Yet this still wasn't enough to release his anger, so he had to stamp repeatedly onto the spit, until his heart was finally comforted.

Just because you were able to block the invasion of the demonic beasts, you think that you are able to face up against Longsong Stronghold? Just carry on being so proud, after all you don't have much time left in which to be so proud!

Cornelius thought that if he hadn't received such reliable information, he would never have dared to come back to Border Town so early. In general, the aristocracy will always return even later than the civilians. After all, mining and hunting was dirty work, it was so hard that the aristocrats would never do them.

Their part was just to supervise the production. And wait until

there was enough ore so that it could be transferred. And in their spare time they would go to their hunters' houses, and ask whether they had any suitable high-quality fur to purchase.

But this year the situation was completely different. Cornelius had heard from the financial director Sir Reynolds that Duke Ryan was ready to drive the 4th Prince out of Border Town – this wasn't a betrayal to the King of Graycastle, no instead they were upholding an order from Timothy Wimbleton, the new King: "Roland Wimbleton is no longer the Lord of Border Town, and if he wants to get re-assigned to a new territory he has to return back to the king's office first."

Duke Ryan had spoken these revolutionary words in front of Sir Reynolds, who had been able to climb up from a position in the City Hall to the position of financial director in only five short years. If they hadn't had a distant relationship as relatives, and if he hadn't sent him two high-quality furs each year, Cornelius would never be able to know what went on in the minds of the people in charge of the west.

"Gaining a new territory after returning to the King" was just an empty statement, even Cornelius knew, that the first Prince without being able to say anything had been sent to the guillotine. So if the 4th Prince went back, would the new king show him mercy?

Without doubt, the west border was under the rule of Duke Ryan, the only question was whether he would wait for the order of King Timothy or if he would act without it. However, when Duke Ryan decided to act, there would be no difference between Roland

Wimbledon and a homeless dog.

This was also the reason why Cornelius had rushed to Border Town, the first reason was naturally to get to the furs as early as possible, but his second reason was to put his own house up for sale. The first point he thought was a very smart idea, while in the previous years the civilians fled to the Longsong Stronghold to take refuge, their inventory was naturally empty, so early in the year. But this year they had stayed the whole time in Border Town, surely there were some goods he would receive, right? So not only could he make a small fortune, but he could also offer Reynolds some familial piety.

The second point was that Cornelius had asked Reynold to give him a place within the City Hall, although it was just busy work, but it was still better than living in this damned poor place. And since he wouldn't need his house any longer, he should sell it as soon as possible. Who knows when Duke Ryan would start his attack, maybe this unruly mercenary would raid and burn his house, giving him a big loss.

But he never imagined that the house wasn't burned down by mercenaries, but instead it was directly removed by the 4th Prince. When the Baron thought once more about this fact, he gritted his teeth in anger, it was one of my best houses ah! Although one hundred and fifty gold royals were an exaggeration, but it had at least a value of thirty gold royals.

In order to get the money early, he had even bent his back, and had reluctantly accepted twenty gold royals, but then His Highness even treated him in such a crazy way! Instead of giving him his

coins, he was even threatened by defection. Doesn't he know that each year to the beginning of the Months of Demons, all the nobles evacuated towards Longsong Stronghold?

Wait a minute... Cornelius suddenly slowed down, there seemed to be something wrong. Although he had previously heard of the 4th Prince bad character, the Prince was always acting without thinking, he even maliciously molested Baron Simon's wife directly after he had arrived at Border Town. Afterwards this became a private joke for a long time. But today, the impression he received from the Prince didn't match with what he knew. The Prince had never become angry nor did he act shamelessly, instead it was Cornelius himself who had shown bad character and acted completely without rhyme or reason. During the whole talk, the other side had constantly spoken in the same tone.

So why had he become so scared, even having obediently giving up his own house? If he had said that the house was his own, would the Prince really have killed him, or not?

Right... Cornelius couldn't help himself from shuddering, sweat on his forehead shrinking back. Now, in retrospect, when he'd faced the prince, he'd had the illusion that he was instead talking with Duke Ryan.

The Baron shook his head hard, trying to search through these unpleasant memory at the back of his mind. Anyway, the 4th Prince will only be proud for a few days longer. Soon Duke Ryan will bring Border Town back under his rule, and then His Highness Roland Wimbleton will also be escorted back to Graycastle, I will have a good laugh at him then. Perhaps those twenty gold royals

were lost, but in the end Duke Ryan will still seek out revenge for myself.

Stopping his thinking here, he was finally able to relax again. Since he had received some high-quality pieces of fur, and he didn't need to sell his house any longer, he could simply sail back to Longsong Stronghold now. Delivering the message to "the member of the aristocracy who had the same misunderstanding," simply has to be a great act. When I return to Longsong Stronghold, I have to imitate it as good as possible, so that everyone knows what a bluff looks like.

When he finally left the castle area, walking down the road to the harbor, Cornelius passed a woman who was wearing a hood.

Originally, there was nothing strange about it, after all the townspeople were coming and going all the time, but the woman was all dressed up. Maybe she was a young lady or an upper-class woman, on her way seeing the Prince. But when a gust of wind blew up the corner of her hood, Cornelius felt his heart jump, and he couldn't catch his breath.

God, that's what a woman should look like, with rare green long hair, even just revealing a part of her face for a moment, was enough to get me stunned. Even if the King in Graycastle called for the princesses of other aristocracy he wouldn't see someone like her, so how is it possible that someone so beautiful is in Border Town?

He turned around, wanting to catch up with her, seeing what she would do, only to discover that she was walking straight into the

direction of the castle.

Is this the kind of woman the Prince has access to? The Baron hesitated a bit longer, but in the end he gave up. He just really didn't want to have anything to do with the 4th Prince, such a wicked person should be left for Duke Ryan to clear up, I still have to get back to Longsong Stronghold.

Arriving at the pier, he entered his own single-masted clipper. The boatmen pulled at the sail, and the boat quickly left the pier, sailing in the direction of Longsong Stronghold.

On the way back, while sitting in the sun, Cornelius saw quite the spectacle.

About five miles away from Border Town in a field of snow, a large group of people entered his field of vision – they were all wearing the same brown leather armor, and a long wooden pikes on their back. Forming a long line, they slowly marched through the snow. Although he was separated from them by a small forest so that he couldn't clearly see everything, he was still sure that there was at least one hundred people.

Those are... the farmers the 4th Prince used to confront the demonic beasts?

In the early months of the year, when the snow still covered the roads, it was absolutely difficult to walk in the snow, Cornelius couldn't even imagine it. But the group of people were still moving down the road, and it even looked as if the snow was at least one

foot deep, this wasn't a small matter...

He wanted to laugh at the ridiculous sight, only to discover that he was unable to. A feeling of doubt unconscionably arose in his heart, the knights under Duke Ryan's command, would they also be able to do this?

Chapter 96 - Leaves

Leaves saw that there were people busy everywhere; she had never thought that she would ever return to a town in the secular world.

After crossing the border of Border Town, one story brick buildings which were covered in dust appeared one after another in front of her. Even though it was only half a year since she had fled into the Impassable Mountain Range, she still felt like she had just stepped into another world.

The Months of Demons just came to an end, so after passing the winter the townsfolk were short on food and clothing, and the complexion of their bodies should be very bad, at least this was what Leaves remembered when she had crossed the slums of Silver City and her journey to the West – everywhere where people who died from the cold or from hunger. And if they were living they still walked as if they were already corpses. With an empty gaze and a slow and unsteady movement.

But here, most people she saw were full of vitality, some were even drying fishes at the entryways of their houses'; some had climbed on top of their roofs to repair damaged tiles; other young men were carrying hoes and hammers. They talked and smiled to each other while walking to the north of the town. To prevent other people from trying to talk to her, Leaves pulled her hat down, as far as possible.

The castle stood at a very striking area, it was placed at the southwest corner on top of a hillside. There was no plants around

her, so if she wanted to sneak into the castle it was quite difficult. Hiding herself in the trunk of a tree would be okay, but letting it stand up and walk would be too much.

For a witch, she really wasn't good at hiding her body. So after carefully considering her options, Leaves thought that rather than hiding herself, she wanted to walk openly into the castle.

If Nightingale didn't lie to her, then even if she entered through the main entrance she wouldn't face any problems.

And in case Nightingale deceived her, deceived the Witch Cooperation Association, she was also self-confident enough that she would be able to flee from the two guards at the entry.

Of course, there was also the worst case scenario, that Nightingale had betrayed everyone and there weren't any witches working for the prince. If that was the case she would in all likelihood die. As a top fighting witch, very few people would be able to escape if Nightingale wanted to kill them, she was probably even stronger than Cara. If they fought each other, it wasn't certain who would win.

Leaves had already prepared herself for the worst case. If she was unable to come back, Scroll would take over the position as Mentor and lead her last sisters into their future – no matter where their destination laid, no matter where at which place they ended, no one knew the answer.

She slowly walked up the hill, coming close to the castle's gate.

And was soon noticed by the guards, who put their hands on the hilt of their swords, and one loudly snapped: “This is the Prince’s Palace, it’s no place for you, you should quickly go back!” He paused, and then added, “If there is something important you have to report, go straight to the left and follow the street until you reach the Town’s Hall, there are people who will receive you.”

Leaves took a deep breath, then she took off her hood. Not surprisingly, she saw a surprised look on their faces. When she saw that the other side had recovered their feelings, she bluntly said: “I am a witch.”

At the moment she said the sentence, she almost expected the other side to draw their swords. Yet the two guards just stared at each other, there was no ordinary man who could hide their feeling of disgust when they heard she was a witch, but their faces showed only curiosity. One of them even asked with interest, “You are a witch? What ability do you have?”

Hearing their response Leaves heart begun to beat faster, she was almost unable to hold her excitement back from breaking out. While trying to keep her voice calm she said: “I want to see Nightingale, Anna or Nana would also be okay.

In Nightingale’s story, the witches were frequent visitors to the castle. The prince didn’t restrict their freedom, only acting as their guardian, even letting them come and go as they pleased... But if Nightingale’s story wasn’t true, the guards surely had never heard of their names.

One guard turned to his partner, the one who had previously

spoken out loud, patted his shoulder and said. “You will keep her here, and I’m going to inform His Royal Highness.”

Leaves watched him walk through the gate, soon disappearing in the direction of the garden.

While waiting for what would happen now, she thought about the probabilities. In the end, would Nightingale greet her like a sister, or were the guards at this moment surrounding her, or would she be attacked by a blade out of the shadow?

She found herself in a strange contradiction, obviously, she wanted to believe in Nightingale, but the closer she came to the answer, the more afraid she became of the thought to get disappointed. Maybe Nightingale was a secret agent? The Names of Anna and Nana weren’t made up by her, right? or...

For her, the time had never passed slower than at this moment! Every heartbeat was like a hundred years for her, for her, it was a very long time that she had to wait until her destiny was decided.

In the end, she didn’t know how long or how short the moment was she had to wait until she heard Nightingale’s voice – as if in a trance, she was unable to do anything, only asking herself if she heard it right.

A familiar figure emerged from the gate, bounced over and reached Leaves side almost at the same time as her voice. The next moment she was already wrapped in a warm hug.

“Leaves, welcome home!”

“This is my spare uniform, for the moment you can wear it,” said Nightingale who rummaged through her cupboard. “Here is the jacket, shoes... well, here is also a nightgown and bath towel.”

“Why are you in such a hurry,” Wendy shook her head with a smile on her face. “You only have to wait until His Highness is up, then she will get everything.”

Seeing how busy Nightingale was to help her, Leaves’ eyes became warm. She took a deep breath, trying to suppress her tears.

From the beginning Nightingale had never lied to them, there really existed a prince who treated witches nicely.

“Do you want to take a bath first?” asked Nightingale and placed the towel and bathrobe directly beside her. “At the moment His Royal Highness is taking a nap, when he finally wakes up he will gladly receive you. Right, were you able to find the Holy Mountain? How did you and the other sisters fare?”

When this sentence was spoken, Leaves line of sight became suddenly blurred, unable to bear it any longer, she wrapped her arms around Nightingale, releasing the long suppressed pain inside her heart.

After having cried for a long time Nightingale’s chest had already

become wet from the tears, but at least Leaves was finally able to calm down.

Then she began to tell them what had happened after their last meeting, telling them from all the suffering they had to bear. When it came to the point where her sisters were buried in the wild, she felt how Nightingale took her hand and squeezed it.

When Leaves' story came to its end, Wendy's look became very heavy, "I had never expected that Cara would bring the Witch Cooperation Association to its end... From the forty-two sisters only seven people... It was also my inescapable responsibility if I hadn't stood firmly on Nightingale side..."

"It wasn't your fault," said the Nightingale sadly. "No one can predict the future; now the important part is to decide what to do next." She looked at Leaves, "You said there were six other sisters who survived, where are they now?"

"They are at the entrance to the canyon waiting for a message from me. We previously made an appointment, if I'm unable to come back, Scroll will lead them away from here, maybe to the extreme south, perhaps even crossing the sea..."

"Then we will have to go to the canyon and get them," said Nightingale excited. "I'll leave now. Wendy will stay here and take care of you."

"Wait a minute, what will you do if they don't believe you? Leaves will have to go with you, just call Lightning to follow along.

At the moment she should be training for her flight towards Longsong Stronghold. Take some horses with you, like this, our sisters can ride the last part of their road.” Wendy carefully urged.

“But His Highness... isn’t he still sleeping?” Leaves became stunned, “Don’t you need to get his approval first?”

“Rest assured,” said Nightingale reassuringly, “If His Royal Highness knew about this, I am afraid he would went crazy from waiting.”

Chapter 97 - New Witches, New Abilities

(Part 1)

When Roland walked into the office, he was surprised to discover that the one waiting for him wasn't Nightingale, but Wendy.

"What happened?" He poured himself a cup of warm water, "Where's Nightingale?"

"She went to meet our sisters."

"Are you," Roland, having raised his cup, ready to drink, suddenly felt that something was wrong, "Wait a minute. What sisters?"

"Our sisters from the Witch Cooperation Association, they've come to Border Town," Wendy replied.

"Aren't they still busy looking for the Holy Mountain?"

He jumped to his feet. "How many people are there? The one that wanted to kill Nightingale... I seem to remember she was called Cara, is she also coming?"

"No, your Highness... they were unable to find the Holy Mountain. When they finally managed to enter the wildlands, they were attacked by terrible monsters, ultimately only seven sisters survived." Wendy reported what Leaves had told her, then she

bowed to apologize, “You were still napping, please forgive us for deciding that Nightingale and Lightning should go and pick them up.”

“No,” Roland said while waving his hand in refusal, “You already know that I won’t blame you for what you decided. What are their abilities?”

“This I don’t know, but Leaves told us that they don’t belong to the fighting type of witch, perhaps...” Wendy hesitated, “They aren’t of much use to you.”

Non-fighting type? Roland’s heart was suddenly full of expectations, the God’s Stone of Retaliations, and the witches small area of effect drawback, actually already limit the fighting capability of the witches by a lot. So production was their strongest field in any case. If there is a witch with the ability to produce plastics, I would be able to solve the problems of my rough processing technology. I could directly step into the mechanical production era; If they have a witch with an electrical ability with them, she would be able to turn the night into day for Border Town. If the next King took a witch as his bride, they would be able to lead us to the pinnacle of life. They could leading us to achieve ‘Deng Xiaoping’s’ [four modernizations](#). Just thinking about these possibilities makes me already totally excited.

“Your Highness, if you don’t need them...” Perhaps the silence was too long for Wendy, that she began to worry and so whispered.

“No, how could that be possible,” Roland said , not letting her speak one word more, “As many witches as arrive, is as many I will

accept.”

Around sunset, Nightingale returned smoothly with the last from the sisters from the Witch Cooperation Association. Roland, who was already waiting for them, had prepared a sumptuous dinner in the Castle Grand Hall, trying to wash away the memories of the hardships they had encountered during their travels.

The witches were obviously very hungry, but it was their first time dining in such a grand environment, they were all acting very reserved. For many of them, it was the first time seeing a Lord, not to mention that this Lord was even a prince of this country.

Fortunately, in addition to Roland himself, there were also the two local witches Anna and Nana who demonstrated how to act and not to forget there was also the lively Lightning. In the end, they were finally able to let go of their shyness, and start to enjoy the banquet even starting a happy conversation.

Roland was chewing on a slice of bread, at the same time he was also looking on with high spirit at the quite different styled women before him. Even with their uniqueness, they could all still be regarded as beautiful women. This was the great gift of magic – even with the technology of the science in the future, those witches wouldn’t have the need to use any of it. Even without cosmetic surgery, their appearance was still able to turn every head.

Since Karl still wasn’t finished with the construction of the living area for the witches, the only possibility was to place all of them inside of the castle. There were still four rooms vacant on the

second floor. So Roland considered changing the single person rooms into double occupancy rooms. After all, those big beds were actually prepared for visiting nobility, it could easily accommodate two people and still have room to spare.

The Prince waited until the end of the dinner and then finally asked the long awaited question – what were their abilities.

Like a wolf herding sheep, Nightingale brought them one after another into the office. There Roland asked all of them specific questions about their life and abilities etc., all things that were comparable with a job interview. He recorded each of their characteristics, he also tested their abilities while being protected by the effect by a God's Stone of Retaliation. When the last interview with the witches was finally completed, he took a deep breath and stretched out his tensed body. If he wasn't afraid that Nightingale might be directly beside him, eavesdropping, he would have liked to start humming 'Super-Star'.

Although there weren't any witches with the ability of electricity or shaping material, which could have been used to raise the slow modernization speed, but this batch of witches was still able to bring Roland an ample amount of pleasant surprises.

First and most important of them was the witch called Leaves.

He spread all the records he had collected over the table and took hers back into his hands.

Prior to adulthood, Leaves was still only able to speed up the

growth of plants and their fruits. But after her day of adulthood her ability had greatly improved, besides her growth control of plants she could now also manipulate them.

The first ability could be used to improve the quality of fruits and seeds, increase yield, and also increase their herbal effects. Her ability also had possibility of altering a plant's characteristics and traits.

According to her explanation, if she put her magic into a plant, she was able to grow green leaves on a dead branch. While, if she put her magic into weeds she could wrap them around her enemies' feet and doing so entrap them. But the most remarkable thing was that she was able to integrate herself into a tree.

However, the bigger the plant, the more magic she had to spend to manipulate it. So she preferred using weeds during combat as it showed a faster effect while having a lower cost.

The range at which she was able to cast her power, even through physical materials (such as earth), was around five meters.

There was no doubt that the witch whose ability resembled her name and whose green hair also her appearance, would be a good helper to improve the agriculture. So her importance to Roland was self-evident – industrialization required a large population, and if there was a large number of people it also needed an adequate supply of food to support the population. This was achievable through either self-producing or through trade. If they used the former possibility and the production wasn't efficient enough, most of their human resources would have to go work in

the fields. The second point was very difficult to achieve because of this era's ability to transport goods.

Now that he was able lay his hands on a Druid, Roland hoped to use only a few farmers to feed a large number of the industrial population, and with this accelerate the process of industrialization in his territory.

Therefore, in the future, he would let her practice improving the quality of wheat and barley seeds so that they would deliver a larger yield. As long as she only improved them by at least a little, it would still greatly help to improve his territory overall and raise the upper limit for the population. In addition, Roland had heard that the Fjords also had some unique types of food. According to Lightning's description, it sounded like they had both potatoes and corn. If these rumors were true, then introducing those two plants as crops should become one of his highest priorities. After all, wheat itself wasn't a high-yielding crop.

Roland carefully wrote down the future practice plan, and then put Leave's data aside, and then he drew the second piece of paper from the table.

The second witch he had interviewed was named Scroll, she was also the oldest witch within the seven survivors, this year she was close to forty years old.

This was a really rare age for a witch. The older they became, the harder it was to resist the demonic bite. But when she described her ability to him, Roland could immediately understand why she had been able to reach that age.

Her primary ability was having a much better memory than the ordinary person. Her memory has become so good, that she could almost be regarded as already unable to forget anything. On her day of adulthood, she had also gotten a very interesting branch to her ability: She could read books and for a short period of time, create a copy of it, because of this, Roland named her ability “the illusion of a book.”

Since she used her main ability almost all the time, Scroll could easily pass each Day of Awakening. This was also the reason, why even though she came from a very poor family, she was still so knowledgeable... This ability greatly enhanced her learning ability, especially for exercises where someone would need to remember important texts. Casting her branch magic was very taxing for her body, how long she could create a copy of a book was dependant on how much mana she had remaining within her body, usually it was enough for one to two hours.

Obviously, Scroll was a natural born teacher. If, in the future he wanted to increase the standard of education, she was a teacher who could teach nearly anything. Well... as for now, Roland thought, her ability didn't offer much to practice, so he simply put her file to the side while thinking: when I have some leisure time, I can write some primary math and primary physics problems down to teach her. So that when the time is ripe, she will be able to enlighten the education sector.

Chapter 98 - New Witches, New Abilities

(Part 2)

The name of the third witch was Hummingbird, she was a witch that had a small size, just like her nickname depicted. When asked to perform her ability she had acted much more cautiously than the other witches had. It was just in this year that she had become an adult, had symmetrical dimples on her cheeks and very delicate features with a waxy soft voice, summing it up she was cute.

Her ability was to “lighten an object”. When she put her magic into an object, it’s weight would be greatly reduced. According to her description, the weight would almost become close to zero. Roland let Hummingbird give him a live demonstration with her own cup, seemingly letting it float in the air – in other words, its weight was about equal to the air. Of course, in this era in the eyes of the people, the air had no weight.

It seemed it was due to her ability, that the Witch Cooperation Association was able to cross the Impassable Mountain Range. With the help of this young witch, the bags could be filled up with the wheat and dried fish and were still easily to carry. Like this, only a few people had been needed to carry a lot of materials, which had significantly reduced the trouble with logistic.

Although Hummingbird had already become an adult, but she still hadn’t developed any branch magic. To cast her magic, she needs to be in contact with her target, in addition the target wasn’t allowed to be a living entity. The bulkier the object, the more time would need to transform its weight and the more magic she would consume. However, once the conversion was completed, it would

last for several hours.

This capability looked to be very suitable for the transportation industry, and it also had some promising uses in the upcoming war. But there were still just too many unknown elements, so her ability still needed to be more researched before that.

Thinking all this through, Roland wrote at the bottom of her parchment: Learning to control the needed magic output, by training with stones of different weights, so that in the end she can precisely determine the effective time of her magic.

After finishing the first three training programs, he ordered his attendant to light another candle, making the room brighter. But even with this, in the waving orange candlelight, the reading and writing became much more tiring to his eyes.

Roland yawned and took the parchment with information concerning the fourth witch.

The fourth witch had a rare surname, with her full name she was called Soraya Zoen. She belonged to a merchant family from Graycastle and had brown short coils and a pair of slender eyes. On top of her nose she had a small freckle which didn't destroy her beauty, instead, it gave her a unique touch of youthful vitality.

She was nineteen years old and her ability was also a very special. After all, she was able to paint a picture of everything she saw or could imagine. In addition, with her "Magic Pen", which was her branch ability, she was able to draw without any paint on any

paper and it would be just like creating a photo-realistic image.

Her ability which was just like a camera, had endless possibilities and as for her training, he would just let her draw some paintings every day.

Afterwards, he pulled out the next parchment.

The fifth witch was called Echo and was a woman from the extreme south. She was tall, had brown skin and her eyes and nose had the typical southern features, giving her a very exotic look. According to her story, after her awakening, she was able to imitate any animal's call and after her day of adulthood her calls had only gotten more wonderful and charming. She didn't develop any branch ability.

Roland decided to name her ability "Magic Sound", as for the long time uses he had no idea, even for practice possibilities... she should just roar at the top of her voice as much as she wants.

The sixth witch who came in to be interviewed was Lily, who was only sixteen years old. She had two ponytails and a delicate doll-like face, without showing any facial expressions while sitting in front of Roland. Her ability was to prevent food from rotting, and even though her awakening had only been one year ago, she was still the witch with the most important role in the Witch Cooperation Association – without any food preservation, a lot of food would have become inedible during their journey. Lily together with Hummingbird would be a good addition to his logistic force.

As for how she kept the food fresh, whether she was killing the bacteria or had any other means was still to be confirmed. Roland decided to let her practice on all kinds of meat and fruits, and that she should also confirm her magic power's – time of duration ratio.

He rubbed his tingling neck and put the information about the six witches on a pile and set them to the side. Now there was only one last piece of information on his table.

After Leaves, she was the next surprise for Roland.

Seventh Witch: Mystery Moon.

She was very nervous when she walked into the office, Nightingale even had to come in to comfort her for a while. Nightingale later whispered to Roland the specific reason why she was so nervous, into his ear.

Even so her ability was still a mystery, yet it was known as the worst ability within the Witch Cooperation Association. It could even be said to be useless, since it was also easily accomplished by human labor. Coupled with often being blamed by Cara, she has become very timid, and now she feared that if Roland also thought that she was useless, he would ban her from Border Town.

Her main ability was to magnetize an object, before she reached her adulthood she was only able to magnetize metallic objects but afterwards she was able to magnetize any object she was able to put her hands on. She also didn't have any known branch ability and

the magnetizing process was also extremely slow. According to her story, it would take her half a day to magnetize a square stone block the size of about half a foot.

This ability wasn't of much use to the Witch Cooperation Association. A magnet wasn't new to them, every huge vessel sailing across the seas was equipped with a six-point compass, so they could easily identify their direction. On the contrary, her magnetized objects were causing problems, for example a metallic pot which was lighten by Hummingbird flew always in the direction of her magnetized objects, in the end Cara even banned her from using her power.

But for Roland, this taciturn girl was simply a priceless gift.

She was also the reason why he wanted to hum 'Super-Star' – was there anything more appropriate than the lyrics of, "You are electric, You are light"?

Magnetoelectric, electromagnetism, was knowledge that any science and technology dog would know about. He thanked Faraday, Gauss, Ampere and Maxwell whole heartedly. With electricity, there also was light. Perhaps it wouldn't take him much longer, until he will be able to show Border Town a new miracle.

A witch who was forbidden from using power and was still able to survive the demonic bite, showed that her self-esteem wasn't so fragile. At least her desire to live on, was much stronger than of most other people. Roland was secretly overjoyed that she only joined the Witch Cooperation Association less than a year ago, or else over the years she would most likely have become a living ruin

under Cara's rule.

With much enthusiasm he wrote: In the following days, Mystery Moon will magnetize a variety of items as training, and determine the relationship between the consumption of her magic and the size she can magnetize.

With the addition of these seven new witches, Roland witch-lineup had increased to twelve. After seeing so many examples, Roland got a general understanding of magic. Their traditional classification of combat and non-combat type wasn't reasonable, Roland instead preferred to divide them by the characteristics of their magic abilities. Summarizing it, the witch's ability can basically be divided into three categories.

The first category was the self-strengthening type. This type of ability seemed to be very rare, so far only Scroll seems to belong to this category. Even under the effect of God's Stone of Retaliations, she still wouldn't lose her extraordinary memory.

The second type was the summoning type. Anna, Nightingale, Nana, Lightning, Wendy, Leaves, Soraya, Echo and Lily all fell into this category. Its characteristic was that the magic could be summoned outside of their body – yet the area of effect was only about five-meter or less. Witches that fell under this category were the witches who were the most suppressed by God's Stone of Retaliation, once they stepped into its suppression zone, any magical effect would disappear. However, in the case that the power was used before it was blocked, the result was permanent and irreversible.

The third type was the attaching magic type. This belonged to Hummingbird and Mystery Moon. Their magic was displayed by direct contact with their target, the conversion process was also very slow, and the consumption of magic was quite large, and it could always be interrupted by God's Stone of Retaliation. However, once the conversion was completed, the added properties became inherent properties, which were effective even within the suppressive area of the God's Stone of Retaliation. How long the enchantment took effect depended on the amount of magic power used and the objects' size.

Most probably this is also the reason why the God's Stone of Retaliation is unable to suppress the rampaging magic during the demonic bite, he thought, God's Stone of Retaliation doesn't affect the converging magic or the inner magical flow, it only affects magic during the processing time. Described in layman's terms, it only affects outside powers and no inside powers.

Roland put the quill down and rubbed his eyes. No matter what, he was going to have a busy future.

Chapter 99 - Night Talk

The witches were unable to sleep at this time, after having suffered for so long, they still couldn't believe that they were so welcomed by the Prince. There were no fetters and no guards, the Prince even allowed everyone to live within the castle, sleeping in such spacious rooms.

Wendy had already guessed that her sisters would feel uneasy, so she together with Nightingale had went to collect all of their sisters and meet in one room. There they sat on the ground in a circle, happily chatting and calming their emotions.

This is the manner that a leader should have, Leaves thought to herself, if it were Cara, who was absolutely scrupulous, she would never have noticed their condition, or even if she had noticed, she wouldn't see a reason to comfort her sisters.

"Sister Wendy, His Royal Highness... what shall we do?" Hummingbird asked timidly. "Our abilities are much worse than what you and Sister Nightingale can offer."

This caused a feeling of resonance within her other sisters, who nodded to support her.

Wendy seeing this began to laugh, "Let me think, well... the first thing you all should do is to practice your ability."

"Practice our ability?" Soraya asked hesitantly, "Does His Royal Highness want me to draw portraits of him all day long?"

“Probably,” Wendy patted Mystery Moon’s head. “You too, even if Cara forbade you to use your ability in the camp, His Highness doesn’t. Instead, he even encourages you to use and discover your own ability.”

“But my ability brings problems to our sisters,” said Mystery in a very low voice.

“Even if that is the case you still need to practice,” said Wendy categorically. “It’s to save your lives.”

“What does life and death have to do with training our abilities?” Leaves couldn’t help herself from asking.

“Yes, the witches, with His Highness method, were able to safely survive the Day of Awakening,” Nightingale interjected before Wendy could answer. “From now on, we can bid farewell to the demonic bite, all of us sisters can easily pass the Day of Awakening.”

All the witches were now staring at Nightingale, and for the moment they couldn’t believe what they heard. “Are you speaking about what happened to Miss Anna?” Scroll asked in astonishment, “but last time you didn’t tell us how she was able to accomplish it.”

“Yes, at that time it was still only His Highness speculation, but in the meantime, it was also Nana’s Day of awakening – all day long she wasn’t hurt.”

“Then this method is...” Scroll couldn’t speak any further, it was just too unbelievable.

“As long as we can consume all of our magic power daily,” Nightingale continued to explain, “I’m able to see how the magic power within your bodies changes, due to regular usage, your body is able to adapt to the magic and your magic reserves will also increase – while at the same time the suffering during the demonic bite will also be reduced. When it is close to your Day of Awakening, as long as you consume all your magic and keep your magic reserves empty, the demonic bite won’t cause your body any harm.”

“I think everyone can even faintly feel it,” Wendy added, “While we were always chased by the church, we always hid in the furthest parts of town, not daring to use our abilities. So every winter we lost many sisters. But this year, while living in the camp in the Impassable Mountain Range, besides for Ari and Ami everyone else was able to safely live through the Day of Awakening.”

Thinking about this, Leaves took a deep breath, when she had encountered the demonic bite while traveling through the wilderness, it’s duration was exceptionally short. “In other words, the Holy Mountain is not a piece of land...”

“Yes, the Holy Mountain isn’t a place,” Wendy nodded. “As long as we can accept ourselves as what we are, not thinking of ourselves as the devil’s subordinate, and we no longer hide our abilities, we are our own Holy Mountain.”

“Wendy had even asked His Highness if he allowed her to go to the Witch Cooperation Association camp when the Months of the Demons had ended, to tell you the news.” Nightingale looked at Wendy and softly said, “Like this, even if you hadn’t found the Holy Mountain, you could still live freely within the mountains.”

“Since everyone is here now, it is unnecessary to mention this,” Wendy smiled and shook her head, “It isn’t important if you are needed by His Highness or not. Even if it’s only for the reason to keep yourself safe, you need to practice every day.”

“If this is really the key to release us from the demonic bite, can it be that other witches were already aware of this?” Scroll asked and after thinking for a moment, she answered her own question “We weren’t the first Witch-Society. The Kingdom of Dawn and the Wolfheart Kingdom had already their own societies. We even sent them letters inviting them to accompany us on our search for the Holy Mountain, but we never received any reply from them.

Leaves gently sighed, she had the same thought but didn’t say it. Since Cara found the ancient book in the ruins at the eastern border of the Kingdom of Graycastle, she firmly believed in the Holy Mountain and took us all with her on her endeavor. At this point, the society started their long march into the exile, almost across the entire kingdom. During the journey, we meet many new sisters, but we also lost a lot of them. If from the beginning we had hidden ourselves within the ruins, would we have found the key?

“We can try to contact the witches hiding in other cities,” suggested Nightingale, “this was His Highness plan anyway. He

wanted to let other witches know of this safe haven by releasing rumors. Like this, it would surely greatly release their worry.

“In the end, I still don’t understand the point why His Highness should accept all of us witches?” asked Echo, clearly confused. The southern witch had clearly suffered worse than most of the other witches. First, she was sold by her own people to a businessman of the Port of Clearwater, who then took her all the way to the capital selling her once again to the King. She was forced to learn the royal etiquette and how to dance. She even had to learn how to skillfully please a man. If it weren’t for the Witch Cooperation Association who rescued her, she would probably already have been sold for an exorbitantly high price to the hands of a Duke or Minister. Until now, her speech had still her own southern accent.

“Maybe he is just the same like those who previously wanted to buy you,” said Lily with a sneer, “Men are...”

“Don’t talk about things you don’t understand, Lily,” said Nightingale resolute and clearly unhappy. “His Highness, Lord Roland, is clearly different from all those you spoke about, after all, some of us are already living here for quite a while.”

“Let’s end it here for today,” decided Wendy and said while still wearing her kind smile, “It’s already late, so everyone should go back to their rooms and try to get some sleep. Even if your ability really isn’t useful to His Highness, he still said that what he wants is for all of you to be able to live a life in Border Town that is as normal as possible. If you want to know what His Highness will ask you tomorrow, it is,” here she deliberately paused for a moment, “I want you to accept this contract.”

After Scroll and Leaves had finally returned to their own room and closed their door, the former said: “It’s getting late we should sleep now.”

“Well.” Even before His Highness had asked about her ability, he had already arranged a room for her and Scroll together. Even so, he had said that this was only a temporary arrangement, and if the construction within the town was finished she could get her own room. But in her view, this bed was spacious enough for three people, so it wasn’t really a problem.

She took off her coat, got under the quilt and was immediately wrapped by an indescribable soft and comfortable feeling. After feeling so much pleasure from finally having a comfortable bed to sleep in, Leaves couldn’t help herself and began to happily croon while burying her head into the pillow. After a long time, she softly asked: “Do you blame Cara for what we had to face?”

Scroll kept silent for a very long time, then she sighed and finally spoke, “No one can predict the future, no matter what she later did, at least at the beginning she really wanted to find a home for us witches. Where we could live in peace, without having to have anything bad in our minds. But this is all is of no importance, you should sleep now, child.”

With this she closed her eyes and murmured, “Good night.”

Chapter 100 - The Ancient Book And The Traces It Gives (Part 1)

Just as Wendy had said, the next morning directly after breakfast a maid came and brought them to Roland's office. There the Prince handed them a fine piece of parchment. Taking into account that some of the witches were illiterate, Scroll read its contents to them. Followed by them signing it with their fingerprint.

Roland knew that it was hard for them to understand the meaning of each line written in the contract, but this wasn't important, after some time they would begin to understand what he wanted from them. He also knew, even if this was a slave contract, they would still have put their signature under it. But Roland didn't think that it was good to lose his principles just to get some small benefits. Since they chose to follow this road, we have to look to where it is leading them to. At the moment everything he made was the laying of a foundation to form a positive cycle for the future. A long-term investment which should end in a win-win situation for both sides.

After receiving the signed documents, Roland gave out the training plan he had developed yesterday evening, and explained to each of them personally what they should do. When he had finished this he called Leaves, Scroll, and Soraya back into his office.

After closing the door, Nightingale showed a royal salute, startling her sisters.

"I've been thinking all night long about the story I've heard

yesterday from Wendy,” Roland opened the curtains, letting bright sunlight flood into the room. “She said you had encountered a terrible monster and only seven of you were able to survive. Even your Witch Cooperation Association Mentor, Cara, died within the wilderness. So I want to know what you have encountered, was it a mixed species or a demonic beasts?”

Leaves was the first to speak: “They weren’t demonic beasts, they were Devils coming from behind of the Gate of Hell. They possessed a tall body and were able to ride on demonic beasts, they were also able to use magic, just...” She hesitated for a moment, “Just like us.”

“They were Devil’s?” Roland frowned, turning his view to Soraya, “Were you also present at the scene?”

The spoken to nodded hesitantly.

“You can draw the scene, right?” asked Roland and gave her a piece of paper.

Soraya closed her eyes, remembering the painful memory, but regardless she still took the paper and went to the table.

Following this, she began to fully display her ability, taking her magic pen in hand. The pen started to release colorful light, which flew from her hand directly onto the paper. A lifelike picture gradually took form on the paper, and during the whole drawing process Soraya never opened her eyes once.

When Roland stepped near the table, he discovered that the picture's imagery looked very realistic – no, he had to correct himself, this wasn't a painting, but an image taken from a real-life scene. Her ability was just like a camera, reproducing the genocide in the wild from a first-person perspective.

When she had completed the painting, Soraya's forehead was covered in sweat, clearly indicating that the memory was a nightmare to her.

Nightingale, went to the table too, taking a look and asked, "Are these the Devils you had encountered?"

"Yes, those are," Leaves pointed to the nearest one from the perspective the picture was taken, "The Devil wearing metal gloves, was able to summon lightning attacks, while the other one was unusually strong, he could throw a spear several times faster than an arrow shot from a bow. More than a dozen sisters died under their hands. But they weren't able to use their special attack the whole time, it was in such a moment of recharging, when I was able to kill them."

"You were able to kill them on your own?" Roland asked.

"Cara's magic snake had ripped open Ironhand's pipe, and he eventually died from that wound. I used the same method, to kill the other one with a crossbow. The pipe seems to store some red gas, and if the gas leaks out they die."

Well, this thing seems to resemble an oxygen tank, how is it

possible for creatures in the wild to have something like this? Roland asked himself in confusion. But directly saying that they have to be aliens, is a little too premature. Looking at their clothes, they are patched together out of pieces of leather and animal skins. This shows that their level of civilization can't be much further developed than ours is.

Whether it was by using magic or technology, that they were able to cross to other planets, already shows their strength – while the people on earth are still fighting against each other all the time.

Of course, we cannot rule out the point, that it's just an innate skill of an exotic civilization. Roland thought, for now, the important point is to remember, that "The Devil" is not an invincible enemy, they can be killed.

"In addition to the Devil, we also saw a city floating in the sky," Leaves added, "No matter how far we moved into its direction, it always stayed just in front of us. Lightning has mentioned something similar to it in her stories, I think she called it a mirage."

"Can you also draw a picture of the city?" Roland asked in Soraya's direction.

She nodded, summoned her pen once more, and begun to paint a city floating in the sky just as Leaves had said.

Roland viewed the picture carefully, but he was unable to get much information from the vague scenery. Even if the city

displayed in the picture really is only a mirage, it still means that somewhere within the wildlands there has to be the real one. There seemed to be red clouds above the city, maybe this is the gas that is needed by the Devils. This explanation is much more reasonable than thinking about aliens, after all, the vast wide lands behind the Impassable Mountain Range is a complete mystery zone, where, for a long time no one had set their feet into, so detecting a new race isn't too surprising.

“I heard from Nightingale and Wendy that Cara decided to look for the Holy Mountain after she read about it in an ancient book,” Roland asked. “Scroll, have you also read the book?”

Scroll hesitated for a moment but then she answered. “Cara didn't allow anyone to read the book, but... I have still seen a little, but the text was quite messy yet... also incredible.”

“Can you make a copy of it and show me?”

“The text written in the book isn't true, Your Royal Highness, that the Holy Mountain doesn't exist confirmed this,” she sighed, but still raised her right hand, “I hope you won't get confused by the book's content.”

Suddenly a book out of golden light appeared midair, the book flipped open and its sides turned with an incredible speed, when the book came to its end, it fell directly into Scroll's hands. “Your Highness, I hope you are the only person who will read it. I don't want to see any of my sisters become like Cara.”

Roland took the book out Scroll's hands and comforted her, "I got it."

When the other witches left the office, Nightingale quietly appeared sitting on the couch. She had lifted up her robe, as usual, and placed both her feet on the table and chewed happily on a dried fish.

"You don't want to see it?" Roland with a smile on his face, asked.

With a scoffing voice, she answered. "I'm not interested in anything that lunatic loved to look at."

Roland shook his head, sat himself back behind the table and carefully opened the book. The pages felt just as if the book has become a reality.

Just like Scroll had said, most of the content was messed up. It seemed as if the text wasn't written in the common language, at least the grammar wasn't the same. Within the book a blood moon was mentioned, as well as a huge stone gate, but nowhere did he find any trace of the Holy City. In fact, apart from some words he occasionally able to understand, the meaning of many other words wasn't clear for him. Most of the Book's content he just couldn't read – in the end his summary was: Even if I knew every word, I'm not sure if I would be able to understand it completely. I'm not sure if it is because of the short peek Scroll was only able to take, or if the book was just recorded this way.

Rolland skipped through the long passages, jumping straight to the end. Even so, the book was quite thick, it had very little content and most of its sides were blank. But when he turned to the last page, he suddenly saw a readable text. The previous neat writing became illegible, as it had been written down in a hurry, but the content was understandable and cleared many questions.

The first sentence still written in neat handwriting was “We have failed. Mortals cannot overcome the Devil.”